

**Post-Revolutionary Body Politics:
Diego Rivera and Juan Rulfo (1922-1965)**

Lucy O'Sullivan

Trinity College, University of Oxford

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Modern and Medieval Languages- Spanish

Trinity Term, 2018

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Short Abstract

This thesis explores evolving aesthetic and intellectual interpretations of nationhood in post-revolutionary Mexico through a comparative reading of the bodily imagery presented in the murals and illustrations of Diego Rivera (1922-1935) and the fictional, photographic and cinematic works of Juan Rulfo (1953-1965). Working in different media, Rivera and Rulfo are identified as monuments to two distinct moments in Mexico's cultural history, yet they have never been examined comparatively. Reading their artistic corpora side-by-side reveals a shared preoccupation with the body that sheds light not only on its function as a critical political signifier in their works, but also on how the ideas of nation and revolution were conceptualised, both literally and figuratively, in primarily corporeal terms during this critical period in Mexican history. Examining their works in relation to key aspects of the post-revolutionary nation-building project, the four chapters of the thesis map an evolution in representations of the body, as it transitions from a state of stability, legibility and cohesion in Rivera's works of the 1920s and 1930s, to one of precariousness, ambiguity and flux in Rulfo's artistic output post-1953. Locating these images for the first time within Mexico's evolving post-revolutionary intellectual landscape and the broader constellation of thinkers and artists that shaped the national imaginary during these years, I analyse their distinct corporeal imaginaries to trace the imagined lifecycle of the revolutionary nation from the euphoria of the 1920s to the phase of disenchantment beginning with the Alemán administration (1946-1952). Corrective to previous studies examining the cultural negotiation of post-revolutionary identity, the thesis analyses these representations within an interdisciplinary framework that sheds light on the intimate but previously unexplored links between artistic and intellectual activity during this period and contextualises Rivera's and Rulfo's works within the broader dialogue between visual and literary forms that defined post-revolutionary artistic production.

Long Abstract

This thesis traces evolving artistic and intellectual interpretations of post-revolutionary nationhood by engaging in a comparative reading of the bodily imagery presented in the murals and illustrations of Diego Rivera (1922-1935) and the fictional, photographic and cinematic works of Juan Rulfo (1953-1965). Rivera's and Rulfo's corpora stand at endpoints on an arc of shifting cultural narratives of revolutionary nationhood in Mexico from the 1920s to the 1960s. In the immediate aftermath of the armed conflict, Mexico's post-revolutionary imagined community was borne out of a process of cultural construction in which visual art played a decisive role. The most visible member of the didactic state-sponsored muralist movement that dominated the cultural field during the 1920s and 1930s, Rivera forged a legible visual language structured around the human body to articulate a utopian revolutionary vision founded on societal unity, order and progress. The wane of revolutionary values during the authoritarian administration of Miguel Alemán (1946-1952), however, triggered a wave of intellectual revisionism that was matched by the emergence of an equally critical literary voice. Alongside the ambiguous human subjects of his photographs, the elusive and unstable bodies populating Rulfo's literary works captured this spirit of mid-century scepticism, encouraging readers to reassess and reconfigure the nation's revolutionary narrative.

This thesis originated with a desire to better understand the lifecycle of this imagined national body as it moves through these transformative decades. What form did it take in the immediate early post-revolutionary years? What conditions contributed to its transformation in the subsequent decades? What can these corporeal images tell us, on a broader societal level, about how the concepts of revolution and nation were interpreted and articulated in political, intellectual and cultural terms during the period under scrutiny? By examining Rivera's and Rulfo's visual and textual depictions of the body against the

shifting political, intellectual, political cultural landscapes of the post-revolution period, *Post-Revolutionary Body Politics* aims to provide a panoramic and multi-dimensional account of the imagined construction and dismemberment of the revolutionary nation from the euphoria of the initial reconstruction phase to the disillusionment of the 1950s and 1960s.

A number of studies have examined the cultural negotiation of post-revolutionary identity, however, these have been limited in their disciplinary scope. Rick López (2010) and Mary K. Coffey (2011) discuss the contribution of visual culture to the state's nation-building project, focusing respectively on the rejuvenation of vernacular aesthetics and the intersections between the muralist movement and didactic museology. In the literary domain, Ignacio Sánchez Prado's *Naciones intelectuales* (2009) has examined counter-hegemonic strategies in literature produced between 1917 and 1959. *Post-Revolutionary Body Politics* breaks new ground by offering the first comparative exploration of how visual art and literature contributed to ongoing debates on national culture after the revolution. The use of such an interartistic methodology is determined by the specific historical context of this particular period, which was characterised by fluid interactions between visual art and literature in the spheres of both artistic production and criticism. Furthermore, visual and literary media performed broadly different political functions from the 1920s to the 1960s, with changing social conditions, most significantly literacy and mounting political discontent, enabling literature to usurp state-sponsored muralism as the dominant mode of socially-engaged art within the cultural landscape. Through the use of a varied multimedia corpus encompassing muralism, illustration, literature, photography and cinema, my project proposes a more textured and multi-dimensional methodology with which to interpret Rivera and Rulfo as individual artists and post-revolutionary artistic production more broadly. In assessing the creative contributions of

Rulfo as a writer, photographer and cineaste and Rivera as painter, architect and theorist of art, the thesis aims to provide a more comprehensive exploration of their aesthetic visions and political concerns. A comparative reading of their visual and literary texts also enables me to produce new interpretations of both canonical and lesser-known pieces, throwing into greater relief the specific formal qualities of their respective media. By contextualising the thematic content and representational strategies of these works within the wider artistic landscape of the period, my analysis draws out broader patterns in how artists narrated the revolutionary nation at pivotal historical moments in the twentieth century.

Recent years have witnessed a burgeoning interest in representations of the body among critics of Spanish American literature, although few such studies have focused specifically on Mexico. The most significant incursion in this field is Rebecca Janzen's recent book *The National Body in Mexican Literature: Collective Challenges to Biopolitical Control* (2015) which examines literary representations of bodies that challenge state-promoted models of nationhood in twentieth-century Mexico, with one chapter devoted to Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*. As Janzen's discussion is restricted to a purely literary analysis of the period spanning from 1940 to 1980, the chronologically broad and interartistic framework of this study offers a substantially expanded analysis of how both literary and visual practitioners articulated political concerns through the body and how these corporeal narratives evolved from the 1920s to the 1960s.

While numerous studies have been devoted to Rivera and Rulfo, none have sufficiently explored the intellectual conditions that harvested their unique aesthetic visions. In contrast to previous studies that have examined their works in a vacuum, I situate their corpora within the context of contemporary developments in the fields of philosophy, historiography, anthropology and architecture to highlight the close links that

evolved between intellectual and artistic interpretations of revolutionary culture during these decades. Embedding my readings within these wider debates on national identity sheds light on how specific aspects of post-revolutionary nationhood continued to preoccupy intellectuals and artists and the extent to which perspectives on these ideas changed during the period under analysis.

The thesis consists of an introduction and four chapters, each consisting of two subsections, and a conclusion. The introduction provides an overview of the Porfiriato, the fragmentary revolution it provoked and the transformations of Mexico's political, intellectual and artistic landscapes from the 1920s to the 1960s. The four chapters of the thesis examine Rivera's and Rulfo's works in relation to key aspects of the post-revolutionary nation-building project, mapping an evolution in representations of the body as it transitions from a state of stability, legibility and cohesion in Rivera's works of the 1920s and 1930s to one of precariousness, ambiguity and flux in Rulfo's artistic output post-1953. In my discussion, I interpret the concept of the 'body' both literally (through close readings of visual and literary composition) and figuratively (as it is employed as a metaphor for the Mexican body politic). By examining the aesthetic and symbolic languages used by Rivera and Rulfo to construct these corporeal images, I demonstrate how the body functions as a site for the articulation of key ideological and aesthetic concerns in their works, either by endorsing or destabilising certain models of post-revolutionary nationhood or by raising questions about the very possibility of narrativising the revolution and its legacy. Through the use of a detailed historical backdrop drawn from print media, speeches and archival materials, I examine how Rivera's and Rulfo's visual and textual bodies relate to both the corporeal metaphors that were employed by post-revolutionary intellectuals and politicians to articulate the concepts of revolution and nation, and the physiological and behavioural ideals that were imposed on real Mexican

bodies through the state's public health campaigns. By establishing connections between these various bodies, the thesis aims to shed light not only on the political dimensions of both artists' visual and textual corporeal visions but also on the broader 'body politics' of the post-revolution period, that is, the centrality of bodies, both imagined and real, to post-revolutionary formulations of nationhood.

Chapter One examines how the literal and figurative 'historical bodies' depicted in Rivera's and Rulfo's works offer alternative perspectives on the foundational narratives of political and ethnic unity that were constructed after the revolution. The first section examines how the corporeal imagery presented in Rivera's mural at the Palacio Nacional (PN) (1929-1935) and Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955) reflect evolving historiographical perspectives on the revolution by upholding or problematising the notion of a unified and intelligible historical narrative. Departing from Michel de Certeau's interpretation of historiography as an act of entombment, I map the creation and dissolution of the state's univocal revolutionary narrative, from Rivera's portrayal of the revolution as a unitary pantheon of heroes in the Palacio Nacional to Rulfo's conceptualisation of collective memory as a cacophonous cemetery in Comala. Adopting de Certeau's account of nineteenth-century historiography as an attempt to fix the body of history as a 'legible picture' or an intelligible *corpus* of knowledge, I examine how the varying legibility of the body in these works reflects changing perspectives on the limitations of historical knowledge, from the totalising post-Porfirian historiographical practises of the 1920s and 1930s to the increasing scepticism and revisionism of the 1950s.

Turning to the myths of ethnic solidarity that were employed by politicians and intellectuals to create a unified and authentic national identity, the second section examines the representation of the indigenous body in Rivera's murals at the PN and the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) and Rulfo's mid-century photographs of the Oaxacan Mixe

tribe in the context of the ongoing intellectual debate on post-revolutionary *indigenismo*. With particular attention to the function of the gaze, I argue that these works reflect a fundamental shift in intellectual and artistic interpretations of the relationship between the mestizo and the *indio*, by moving from an immersive and primarily emotion-based aesthetic model to one founded on critical distance and self-reflexivity.

Chapters Two and Three explore how the positivist motto of ‘orden y progreso’ continued to inform the way that ideal Mexican bodies, both metaphorical and material, were visualised in the decades following the armed conflict. Drawing on Foucault’s theorisation of biopolitics, Chapter Two traces the rise and fall of the state’s citizen-formation project through a comparative analysis of the interplay between bodies and built spaces in the works of both artists. These architectural and anatomical images are examined in the context of the ideal of a stable and rational post-revolutionary body that was promoted through eugenics discourses after 1920 and the functionalist mode of public architecture that became interlinked with the state’s biopolitical project during the 1930s. The first section examines how Rivera articulates the post-revolutionary ‘return to order’ by using concepts of building design to configure a rational architectonic body in his early murals and to establish a parallel between architectural and corporeal discipline in the functionalist-inspired piece *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City* (1931).

In the second part, I consider how Rulfo’s works unsettle these bodily and spatial principles through their exploration of indeterminate figures and built spaces. Employing Walter Benjamin’s theoretical interpretation of the ruin, I argue that the sustained imagery of anatomical and architectural decay presented in Rulfo’s novel dramatises the gradual unbuilding of the utopian models of national identity that were constructed in the previous decades. Examining his mid-century photographs of Mexico City in the context of a contemporary functionalist urban regeneration project, I demonstrate how these works

disturb Rivera's vision of a disciplined urban landscape and populace by foregrounding an elusive and migratory community that lingers in the city's interstices.

Focusing again on the biopolitical dimensions of the state's nation-building strategies, Chapter Three centres on the corporeal dimensions of post-revolutionary *desarrollismo*. It examines Rivera's and Rulfo's artistic treatment of male and female bodies in light of the gendered framework of (re)productive citizenship that was implemented by the state to transform men into efficient workers and women into prolific mothers. The first section examines Rivera's mural cycles at the SEP (1923-1928) and Detroit Institute of Arts (1932-1933) alongside Rulfo's short stories "Macario" and "El hombre" from the collection *El Llano en llamas* (1953) to chart the gradual breakdown of the technologised male body as an expression of revolutionary national progress. I explore how, through their configuration of the technologised subject in terms of corporeal enhancement or perceptual dysfunction, Rivera's and Rulfo's visual and textual machine aesthetics articulate certain contemporary aspirations or anxieties regarding the societal implications of industrialisation. In my discussion of the Detroit cycle, I demonstrate how the body of the male worker constitutes a locus for Rivera's conflicting political agendas in the early 1930s, articulating both the fantasy of a dynamic proletarian subject and the Taylorist ideal of a regimented labouring body attuned to the demands of capitalist production. Applying Benjamin's concept of shock, I then examine how Rulfo's texts incorporate cinematic and photographic techniques to convey the lived sensory experiences of industrial modernity during the years of the economic 'miracle'.

The second section analyses the alternative female corporeal landscapes mapped in Rivera's Chapingo fresco cycle (1924-1927) and Rulfo's novel and short story "Es que somos muy pobres", in relation to the models of reproductive femininity that were promoted by post-revolutionary nation-builders to secure societal order and prosperity. I

demonstrate how Rivera's use of the fertile woman-as-land trope as an expression of revolutionary potentiality is complicated by Rulfo's female characters, whose non-reproductive sexuality poses a threat to national progress. In my reading, I explore how this gradual unfixing of restrictive state-endorsed models of womanhood from the 1920s to the 1950s is mapped as a transition from corporeal containment to overflow in these works, as the bodily fluids of Rulfo's transgressive women spill outwards to merge with sea and rain water. Attending to both artists' visual, architectural and literary treatment of space, I also highlight the link between gender and narrative agency in their works, contending that while Rivera foregrounds male agency in his visual and spatial revolutionary narratives at Chapingo, Rulfo's female characters disrupt both societal and narrative order by aggressively colonising textual space or destabilising the masculine narrative architecture of his works.

Turning to representations of collective bodies, Chapter Four examines representations of the *campesino* mass in the context of the state's rural reform programme. The chapter fills an important gap in existing scholarship by exploring for the first time how the 'sacralisation' of revolutionary politics was experienced in the artistic sphere. Analysing how biblical motifs and religious concepts are employed to depict the post-revolutionary educational and land reform projects across a range of media including muralism, illustrations, literature and cinema, this chapter traces an interartistic history of the state's relationship with the rural peasantry from the 1920s to the 1960s. Positioning Rivera's and Rulfo's works at endpoints of a spectrum of evolving visual and textual portrayals of the *campesinado* and the rural teacher, the first section of the chapter explores how Rivera's previously unexamined state-commissioned illustrations from the late 1920s and Rulfo's short story "Luvina" employ the biblical metaphors of sowing and

enlightenment to convey the peasantry's receptiveness or resistance to the state's socialist education campaigns of the 1920s and 1930s.

The second section of the chapter brings Rivera's mural *El reparto de tierras* (1924) into dialogue with *La fórmula secreta* (1965), an experimental film directed by Rubén Gámez featuring a poetic monologue by Rulfo. In this comparative reading I explore both artists' configuration of the campesino mass in light of the Christianised rhetoric of post-revolutionary *agrarismo*, which encouraged rural communities to subordinate their interests to the 'national good' and framed land reform as an act of divine justice. Contending that Rivera and Rulfo use Renaissance and baroque aesthetic models to political effect, I examine how the meek and orderly congregation depicted in Rivera's mural gradually decays from the 1920s to the strained political climate of the 1960s, giving rise to the amorphous, non-hierarchical animal collective evoked in *La fórmula*. The conclusion reflects on the legacies of Rivera's and Rulfo's aesthetic visions of the nation and the enduring links between art, politics and corporeality in Mexico from the 1960s to the present.

Abbreviations

SEP: Secretaría de Educación Pública

PN: Palacio Nacional

PP: Pedro Páramo

LL: El Llano en llamas

UNAM: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

INBA: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes

PCM: Partido Comunista Mexicano

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Introduction: Post-Revolutionary Body Politics

Soy, cuerpo.

- Carlos Fuentes, *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962)

Painting and writing have so much to tell each other.

- Virginia Woolf, "Walter Sickert" (1934)

A catalogue published in 1954 for the first solo exhibition of the neo-figurative painter Pedro Coronel in Mexico City includes the following brief description of his imagery by the writer Juan Rulfo:

Sus figuras yacen como aplastadas y gimientes en la tortura de la desesperación o huyen casi sin forma hacia un horizonte de tinta. La imagen de nuestro tiempo: el hombre cuyos goznes han sido rotos y cuyas deslavadas arterias se mueven aferrándose al vacío en contorsiones casi macabras.¹

For readers familiar with Rulfo's literary works, these elusive and grotesque figures suggest a striking affinity with the unusual bodies inhabiting his own contemporaneous short story collection *El Llano en llamas* (1953) and novel *Pedro Páramo* (1955).² The significance of this parallel is illuminated by Rulfo's assertion that Coronel's troubled bodies constitute an expression of the present historical moment, they are 'la imagen de nuestro tiempo'. During the 1950s, Coronel formed part of the *Ruptura* movement, led by José Luis Cuevas, which actively deconstructed the heroic revolutionary visual language that had been configured by the state-sponsored muralists in the earlier decades of the 1920s and 1930s. In the aftermath of the violent armed revolution (1910-1917), which had left Mexican soil littered with mutilated corpses and dismembered limbs, the robust and

¹ Quoted in Alberto Vital Díaz, *Noticias sobre Juan Rulfo, 1784-2003* (Mexico City: Editorial RM, 2004), 169.

² These works are subsequently abbreviated as *PP* and *LL*.

resilient bodies surging forth from the epic visual works of the muralists, and most strikingly those of Diego Rivera, provided a compelling fantasy of collective rehabilitation and progress for a divided and debilitated nation. As lasting social change failed to materialise over the subsequent decades, however, discontent rippled through the cultural sphere, prompting mid-century artists to configure an alternative corporeal language to express the devastating failures of the revolutionary project.

This thesis traces an arc in narratives of revolutionary nationhood across the domains of literary and visual culture by engaging in a comparative analysis of the body imagery presented in the murals and illustrations of Diego Rivera (1922-1935) and the fictional, photographic and cinematic works of Juan Rulfo (1953-1965). The idea for this project began with a curiosity to better understand the origins and lifecycle of the deteriorating, unstable and elusive bodies populating so many mid-century artworks, from the paintings of the *Ruptura* generation to the literary works of Rulfo and Carlos Fuentes. How was this imagined national body constructed in the early post-revolution period? What were the conditions that brought about its transformation in the decades that followed? By examining Rivera's and Rulfo's visual and textual corporeal images against the shifting political, intellectual and cultural backdrops of their respective periods, this thesis seeks to provide a multi-dimensional account of the imagined construction and dismemberment of the revolutionary nation from the euphoria of the reconstruction phase to the disillusion of the Miguel Alemán administration (1946-1952).

Rivera and Rulfo cut strikingly different figures within the post-revolutionary cultural landscape, both in terms of their own physical personas and aesthetic corpora. While the larger-than-life Rivera, who forged a robust workman-like public image during the 1920s and 1930s, painted over 6,000m² of wall over the course of his career, the total creative output of the lean and reticent Rulfo amounted to a collection of short stories, a

slim novel and a modest portfolio of published photographs and screenplays.³ Composed from different media, these oeuvres stand as monuments to two distinct moments in Mexico's cultural history. The most visible member of the state-sponsored muralist movement that dominated the cultural field during the 1920s and 1930s, Rivera remains for many Mexico's, and perhaps Latin America's, preeminent artist. His early murals captured the utopian spirit of the immediate post-conflict period by projecting a Janus-like vision of Mexico positioned between an idealised collective past and a progressive proletarian future. Writing in 1925, the prominent thinker Pedro Henríquez Ureña upheld Rivera's frescoes as 'el mejor símbolo del México actual', while the philosopher Samuel Ramos described his imagery as the revelation 'de nuestra auténtica existencia mexicana'.⁴ Since the publication of his two major literary works, Rulfo has been identified as an equally definitive interpreter of Mexican reality. Emerging from the sceptical intellectual climate of the 1950s, his bleak literary portraits of a decaying rural universe comprehensively dismantled the myths of revolutionary unity, order and progress that had been enshrined in Rivera's epic national portraits. Rulfo's novel, considered by Fuentes to be the highest expression of Mexican literature in the twentieth century, was praised by contemporary critics for capturing 'lo propio y singular de México' and 'una atmosfera inconfundible de mexicanidad'.⁵

Yet despite being considered synonymous with post-revolutionary national culture, their works have never been read in dialogue. A comparative reading of these corpora brings to the fore a common preoccupation with the body that sheds light not only

³ David Craven, *Diego Rivera: As Epic Modernist* (New York: G.K. Hall, 1997), 1.

⁴ Pedro Henríquez Ureña, "La revolución y la cultura en México", in *Ensayos*, eds. José Luis Abellán and Ana María Barrenechea (Madrid: ALLCA XX: 2000), 261; Samuel Ramos, "Diego Rivera", in *Diego Rivera y los escritores: Antología tributaria*, eds. Elisa García Barragán and Luis Mario Schneider (Mexico City: UNAM, 1986), 185.

⁵ Alí Chumacero, "La primera novela de Juan Rulfo", *La Gaceta del Fondo de Cultura Económica* 2, no.7 (15 March 1955) 3; Emmanuel Carballo, "Arreola y Rulfo cuentistas", *Revista de la Universidad de México* 8, no.7 (March 1954): 29.

on its function as a key political signifier in their works, but also on how the concepts of nation and revolution were conceived, articulated and contested in primarily corporeal terms more broadly during this critical period. Locating these figures for the first time within Mexico's changing post-revolutionary intellectual environment, and the broader constellation of thinkers and artists that shaped the national imaginary during these years, the dissertation analyses their distinct corporeal languages to trace a history of aesthetic and intellectual interpretations of the concepts of nation and revolution in Mexico from the 1920s to the 1960s. By adopting a chronologically broad and multidisciplinary framework, *Post-Revolutionary Body Politics* explores the intimate yet unexamined links between artistic and intellectual activity during this period and contextualises Rivera's and Rulfo's works within the broader dialogue between visual and literary forms that defined post-revolutionary cultural production. To lay the foundation for this discussion, the introduction will provide a historical overview of the Porfiriato, the fragmentary revolution it provoked, and the theatre of political and intellectual activity in Mexico from the 1920s to the 1960s. This historical survey will be useful for illustrating how the Porfirian regime continued to haunt Mexican politics and culture after 1920, a phenomenon I highlight throughout the thesis. More broadly, this introductory contextual section will serve to draw attention to the intersections of art and corporeality, and how they relate to specific political agendas during these periods of societal transition.

The Porfiriato and Mexico's Many Revolutions

Understanding the series of complex historical events commonly known as the 'Mexican revolution' necessarily leads us back to the late nineteenth century, and the dictatorial regime of Porfirio Díaz. After distinguishing himself among the successful liberal forces of Benito Juárez against the French Intervention (1862-1867), General Porfirio Díaz was

elected president in 1877 and returned to power again in 1884, after a four-year interregnum by Manuel González (1880-1884). Following the turmoil of the post-independence period, Díaz's presidency ushered in an era of unprecedented stability and growth known as the Pax Porfiriana. During this period, public policy was significantly influenced by *los científicos*, a small circle of technocrats including Justo Sierra, Gabino Barreda and José Ives Limantour, whose positivist philosophy dovetailed with the regime's principles of social order and progress and inspired its Comtean motto of 'orden y progreso'. By championing gradual societal change over radical transformation, these thinkers ideologically justified Porfirian authoritarianism.⁶ Sierra explained this interpretation of social development through the use of biological analogies based on the social organicism of Herbert Spencer and aspects of Darwinism. He asserted that:

la sociedad, como todo organismo, está sujeta a las leyes necesarias de la evolución [...] en todo cuerpo, que en todo organismo, a medida que se unifica o se integra más, sus partes más se diferencian, más se especializan, y en este doble movimiento consiste el perfeccionamiento del organismo, lo que en las sociedades se llama progreso.⁷

While the Porfirian 'cuerpo social' evolved rapidly due to the regime's emphasis on export-led economic growth, foreign investment and industrialisation, social evolution was also conceived through a racial prism by Sierra, who identified the mixed-race subject as the dynamic component of Mexican society and advocated the assimilation of indigenous communities in the interest of furthering collective progress. These theories of racial improvement fitted within a broader eugenicist agenda that manifested itself through

⁶ Meri L. Clark, "The Emergence and Transformation of Positivism", in *A Companion to Latin American Philosophy*, eds. Susana Nuccetelli et al. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 61.

⁷ Justo Sierra, "Positivismo político", in *Obras completas*, vol. 1 (Mexico City: UNAM, 1977), 238.

public health campaigns seeking to sanitise and modernise the population towards the end of the century.⁸

In cultural terms, the Porfiriato was a cosmopolitan urban regime that pursued progress through the imitation of European and particularly French models. In an effort to project its image as a modern nation on the world stage, Mexico participated in international exhibitions held in Europe between 1867 and 1889 and set about creating a canon of national art in Mexico between 1867 and 1900. During this period, the motto ‘Verdad, Belleza y Utilidad’ defined the regime’s utilitarian conception of painting as an expression of social progress.⁹ Sierra further pursued this civilising mission through the implementation of an educational curriculum based on positivist tenets and through the provision of state funding for intellectual and artistic activity.¹⁰

Despite dramatic infrastructural development, the progressive veneer of the Porfiriato faded with the increasing centralisation of political power and repression of dissent. The benefits of modernisation were experienced only by a relatively small metropolitan elite and the majority of Mexico’s land lay in the hands of wealthy landowners who overworked and underpaid peasant labourers. In his critique of the regime in *Los grandes problemas nacionales* (1909), Andrés Molina Enríquez condemned this disproportionate growth of the Porfirian ‘social body’:

Por ahora, nuestro cuerpo social es un cuerpo desproporcionado y contrahecho, del tórax hacia arriba es un gigante, del tórax hacia abajo es un niño. El peso de la parte de arriba es tal, que el cuerpo en conjunto se sostiene difícilmente [...] Sus pies se debilitan día por día. En efecto, las clases bajas día por día empeoran de condición y, en la última, en la de los indígenas jornaleros, la dispersión ha comenzado ya.¹¹

⁸ For a detailed discussion of these policies, see Claudia Agostini, *Monuments of Progress: Modernization and Public Health in Mexico City, 1876-1910* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2003).

⁹ Fabiola Martínez Rodríguez, “Representing the Nation: Art and Identity in Porfirian Mexico”, *National Identities* 15, no.4 (2013): 333.

¹⁰ Sierra offered financial support to some of the figures that would go on to shape the post-revolutionary cultural landscape, such as the members of the Ateneo de la Juventud, and a young Diego Rivera.

¹¹ Andrés Molina Enríquez, *Los grandes problemas nacionales* (Mexico City: Imprenta de A. Carranza e Hijos, 1909), 221.

Molina Enríquez's diagnosis was echoed in *La sucesión presidencial*, a book published in 1910 by the landowner Francisco Madero, who would play a pivotal role in the next chapter of Mexico's history. Madero declared his candidacy for the 1910 elections as the leader of the anti-reelection party after Díaz intimated in an interview published in the US magazine *Pearson's* that the nation was ready for democracy. Díaz ordered Madero's arrest and retained the presidency in a clearly fraudulent election. While in exile in Texas, Madero published the Plan de San Luis (1910), in which he declared himself the legitimate president and called for an armed insurrection, setting in motion the first phases of the revolution. Although Madero's planned revolt was a failure, rebel troops mobilised by Pancho Villa and Pascual Orozco scored a decisive victory against Federal forces during the Battle of Ciudad Juárez (1911), forcing Díaz into exile. Following the interim presidency of Francisco León de la Barra, Madero successfully ran for president in 1911.

However, the modest reforms guaranteed by Madero, particularly those relating to land distribution, failed to satisfy revolutionaries hungry for radical social change, such as Emiliano Zapata, leader of the Ejército Libertador del Sur, who denounced him as a traitor in his Plan de Ayala (1911). Madero faced opposition on several fronts and in 1913 he and his vice-president Pino Suárez were murdered as part of a coup d'état by one of his generals, Victoriano Huerta. Huerta was challenged almost immediately. The conservative Venustiano Carranza, who had supported the Madero regime, gathered an army of fighters who united with the forces of Villa and Álvaro Obregón to defeat Huerta and his federal troops in June 1914. The Convención de Aguascalientes of that year aimed to unify these disparate groups but in fact served to further entrench political divisions, resulting in the formation of two groups: the *convencionistas*, headed by Villa and Zapata, and the *constitucionalistas* led by Carranza and Obregón. Although Carranza seized power in August 1914, fighting between the two factions continued. While the battle against Villa

and Zapata raged on, Carranza, with the assistance of Obregón, devised a new charter modelled on the liberal reform constitution of 1857 as the blueprint for a new revolutionary society. Carranza assumed the presidency in 1917, but like Madero, displayed a conservative attitude towards the implementation of social, and particularly agrarian, reform. When Obregón, the most widely respected general of the revolution, launched his presidential manifesto in 1919, Carranza endorsed the candidacy of Ignacio Bonillas, triggering a movement to overthrow the president that resulted in his assassination in 1920. Following the brief interim presidency of Adolfo de la Huerta, Obregón assumed office in November 1920 and set about consolidating the regime through a national reconstruction project that prioritised socio-political stability, economic growth and public education.

For Octavio Paz, the revolution represented ‘la súbita inmersión de México en su propio ser’, a moment of profound self-awakening and self-reflection that would trigger an intense phase of national redefinition.¹² The transition from the Porfirian to post-revolutionary intellectual landscapes is best represented by the activity of the Ateneo de la Juventud, a circle of thinkers formed primarily by José Vasconcelos, Alfonso Reyes, Pedro Henríquez Ureña and Antonio Caso, that had converged around the art journal *Savia moderna* at the beginning of the century. Although by no means a homogenous group, the members of the Ateneo were united in their rejection of the positivist doctrine that had provided the philosophical foundation of the Porfiriato. The group’s most direct link to the revolution was through Vasconcelos, who had acted as editor for the pro-Madero journal *El Antirreeleccionista*. The *ateneístas* viewed the revolution as a ‘nuevo despertar intelectual’ that would liberate Mexico from its positivist dogma and embrace a new

¹² Octavio Paz, *El laberinto de la soledad* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1959), 134.

humanistic framework.¹³ As the conflict raged, Reyes spoke of the intellectual revolution that was unfolding away from the battlefield:

Es la hora de los guerrilleros y de los políticos; pero unos y otros solo pueden aportar soluciones provisionales y crear equilibrios poco duraderos. Solo la obra de la cultura, construyendo lentamente un ideal nacional y descubriendo los caracteres propios de una tradición, puede lograr el bien definitivo de un pueblo.¹⁴

In a similar vein, Henríquez Ureña claimed in 1925 that ‘mientras la guerra asolaba el país [...] los frutos de nuestra revolución filosófica, literaria y artística iban cuajando gradualmente’.¹⁵ These statements echo Sierra not only in emphasising the role of lettered men in the process of national transformation, but also in advocating a more gradual process of societal transformation through ongoing cultural reform. Such parallels reveal how, despite defining themselves in opposition to the intellectual currents of the previous century, the ateneístas in many ways adhered to the models of their Porfirian predecessors.

If, as Alan Knight contends, the nation-building initiatives of the 1920s and 1930s, did little more than ‘pump red blood’ into an ‘anemic corpus of ideas’, this was most strikingly, and appropriately, apparent in the physiological metaphors used by thinkers and politicians to articulate the concepts of nation and revolution.¹⁶ During the armed conflict and its immediate aftermath, the revolution was portrayed as a moment of collective rebirth. Already in the midst of the fighting, Reyes described how Mexico was learning ‘a ejercitar sus propias manos y saberse dueño de sus músculos’, while Education Minister José Manuel Puig Casauranc (1924-1928), speaking in 1925, promised that Mexicans emerging bloodied from the armed conflict would be rehabilitated by a ‘virtud preciosa de

¹³ Henríquez Ureña, “La revolución y la cultura en México”, 255.

¹⁴ Alfonso Reyes, “Literatura Mexicana”, in *Obras completas*, vol.7 (Mexico City: Letras Mexicanas: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996), 467.

¹⁵ Henríquez Ureña, “La Revolución y la cultura en México”, 40.

¹⁶ Alan Knight, “Popular Culture and the Revolutionary State in Mexico, 1910-1940”, *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 74, no. 3 (Aug 1994): 431.

renacimiento'.¹⁷ By the end of that decade, however, descriptions of this new revolutionary national body began to paradoxically echo the ideals of 'orden y progreso' that had shaped the Porfirian social organism. Adhering to the Hobbesian conception of the body politic as an anatomical entity encompassing all the subjects of the Commonwealth, the educator Moisés Sáenz stressed the need for internal cohesion within the 'national body':

Los partidos políticos y la organización de grupos funcionales dentro del cuerpo nacional deben reconocer ante todo el respeto a los hombres y marchar de acuerdo con los dictados de la cooperación y de la solidaridad. Las masas de México deben ser despertadas, rehabilitadas, habría que decir, redimidas - tal es el extremo en que viven -, y luego habrá que proceder a su organización. Organizar dentro de una unidad mayor, orgánica también, que es la nación: patria para todos.¹⁸

During the 1930s, organic imagery was used to conceive both the nation and the revolution, emphasising the dynamic and progressive nature of the latter. Echoing president Lázaro Cárdenas's (1934-1940) definition of the revolution as 'un conjunto indivisible de aspiraciones populares que no se estanca sino que vive en orgánico movimiento de renovación', the prominent leftist intellectual Vicente Lombardo Toledano described it as a self-renewing living entity that was inseparable from the bodies of the masses:

La revolución es una cosa viva, en marcha perpetua, que no sucumbe, que no se agota, que renace incesantemente [...] La Revolución se crea cada minuto, cada hora, cada día, cada año, en la entraña misma de las masas que no han alcanzado aún su liberación definitiva.¹⁹

This projection of the revolutionary nation as a unified, orderly and progressive organism was interlinked with the theories of racial miscegenation that became integral to post-

¹⁷ Alfonso Reyes, "Pasado inmediato", in *Pasado Inmediato y otros ensayos* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1914), 3; José Manuel Puig Casauranc, *Páginas viejas con ideas actuales* (Mexico City: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación Editorial, 1925), 75.

¹⁸ Moisés Sáenz, *México íntegro* (Lima: Imprenta Torres Aguirre, 1929), 263.

¹⁹ Lázaro Cárdenas, "Mensaje a la nación del Presidente de la República", in *Palabras y documentos públicos de Lázaro Cárdenas: 1928-1970*, ed. Javier Romero (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1978), 226; Vicente Lombardo Toledano, "La Revolución Mexicana de ayer y la de hoy", *Futuro* 3, no.10 (December 1936), 1.

revolutionary nationalism. Despite insisting that ‘entre las ideas de entonces y las de hoy, media un abismo’, Vasconcelos and the other ateneístas promoted concepts of racial hybridity that were deeply indebted to the mestizo-centric ideologies of Sierra and Molina Enríquez.²⁰ In his seminal text *La raza cósmica* (1925), Vasconcelos had outlined a process of racial and cultural synthesis that would give rise to a unified and superior ‘cosmic’ race in Latin America. Vasconcelos’s projection of the mestizo body as a metaphorical site of post-revolutionary national transformation translated into real public health and social engineering policies during the 1920s and particularly the 1930s, which sought to actively reshape real Mexican bodies by promoting secular education and hygiene. Discourses of *mestizaje* were complemented by the state-endorsed *indigenista* movement led by the anthropologist Manuel Gamio, who served as director of the Department of Anthropology in the early 1920s and as undersecretary of Education in 1925. Largely shaped by Gamio’s major publications *Forjando patria* (1916) and *La población del valle de Teotihuacán* (1921), the *indigenismo* movement that flourished in Mexico from the 1920s to the 1940s promoted the assimilation of indigenous peoples into the mainstream mestizo population and the celebration of indigenous culture as the basis of an authentic *mexicanidad*.

Cultural Narratives of Revolution

In the immediate aftermath of the revolution, Obregón (1920-1924) initiated an expansive reconstruction project that sought to rehabilitate the nation in not only economic and infrastructural but also cultural terms. In 1921, the president appointed Vasconcelos as Secretary of Public Education to spearhead this project of forging a new nationalist

²⁰ José Vasconcelos, “Don Gabino Barreda y las ideas contemporáneas”, in *Conferencias del ateneo de la juventud*, ed. Juan Hernández Luna (Mexico City: UNAM, 1984), 111.

identity. Inspired by the ambitious cultural campaign launched by Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky as the People's Commissar for Enlightenment (1917-1929) in the early days of the Soviet Union, Vasconcelos set about implementing a nationwide literacy campaign and transforming the Ministry of Public Education into an incubator for cultural projects. Faced with a fragmented and largely illiterate populace, Vasconcelos turned to visual art as a universally accessible medium through which to shape a distinctive and cohesive post-revolutionary *mexicanidad*. As the journal *Savia Moderna* had proclaimed in 1906: 'El arte es vasto, dentro de él cabremos todos'.²¹

While the so-called novel of the revolution started to gain momentum in the mid-1920s, following the resurfacing of Mariano Azuela's *Los de abajo* (1915), substantial state patronage of the visual arts and persistently low literacy rates secured the status of painting, as Paz put it, as 'la hija de la revolución'.²² During the early reconstruction phase, the artistic landscape was dominated by the artists Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros, who were recruited by Vasconcelos to lead a state-funded didactic public mural programme. In their 1923 manifesto, the muralists declared a revolution in aesthetic values, rejecting the elitism of easel painting in favour of a revolutionary art that was genuinely popular in terms of its thematic content, formal composition and public display. For Rivera, the primary goal of muralism was to replace literature as a pedagogical tool: 'Escribir en enormes murales públicos la historia de la gente iletrada que no puede leerla en libros'.²³ Encompassing the dual meanings of the verb *ilustrar* (to illustrate, to educate), the muralists' early works satisfied Vasconcelos's didactic objectives by articulating themes of revolutionary unity and progress through a

²¹ "En el umbral", *Savia Moderna: revista mensual de arte*, March 1, 1906, 1.

²² Octavio Paz, "Los muralistas a primera vista", in *Obras completas de Octavio Paz: Los privilegios de la vista*, vol.4 (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2001), 709.

²³ Quoted in Carlos Monsiváis, "Diego Rivera: creador de públicos", *Historias* no. 13 (April-June 1986): 119.

highly legible visual language. While the murals' elevation of ordinary peasants and workers to the status of national protagonists provided something of a pictorial analogy to the populist rhetoric of post-revolutionary politicians, their reinvigoration of pre-Columbian forms and themes dovetailed with the indigenista celebration of vernacular art. Although the mural movement projected itself as an art of the masses and for the masses, the location of these works within mostly urban municipal buildings rendered them largely invisible to those sectors of the population they claimed to address. While the lack of evidence regarding public reception makes the 'popular' reach of the murals difficult to assess, government patronage of the muralists and their contribution to contemporary cultural debates positioned them at the forefront of the new national imaginary during the early 1920s.

Muralism functioned as a useful political tool for Obregón by projecting an international image of Mexico as a culturally sophisticated modern nation while also promoting domestic inter-class consensus. Most importantly, educational and cultural initiatives enabled the nascent state to generate popular consent without force and thus distance itself from the repressive Díaz regime. In this sense, Mexican muralism and its role within the state's new educational programme can be understood in light of Louis Althusser's identification of culture as an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA). Echoing elements of Gramsci's discussion of hegemony, Althusser outlines how ISAs (which include schools, culture, religious institutions) contribute to a non-violent system of coercion by transmitting the values of the dominant culture and ensuring that the majority of the populace consents to these values.²⁴ While the art programme was ambitious in terms of its scale and funding, the fledgling regime was, however, in no position to fully

²⁴ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation", in *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), 139.

co-opt artists into functioning as tools of official ideology and the relationship between the state and the muralists oscillated between collaboration and confrontation throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

Although Vasconcelos's influence waned towards the end of his term in 1924, the muralists' earliest state-commissioned works bear clear traces of his ideological imprint. While their fusion of vernacular themes and a visual language influenced by European modernism gave rise to a distinctly mestizo visual aesthetic, racial mixing is addressed as a direct theme in Rivera's *Creación* (1922) and Orozco's subsequent *Maternidad* (1923-1924), in which theories of racial miscegenation and contemporary rhetoric of national rebirth converge to form a mestizo creation myth. The visual metaphor was of particular relevance to Rivera, who consciously echoed the contemporary rhetoric of post-revolutionary national regeneration by describing his homecoming to Mexico in 1921 as a form of personal and artistic rebirth.²⁵ After completing his formative years as an artist at the Academia de San Carlos in Mexico City (1897-1907) under the direction of Porfirian academic painters such as Santiago Rebull and José María Velasco, Rivera had moved to Paris in 1908 with the assistance of a government scholarship; while there, he established important links with prominent artists including Modigliani, Matisse and Picasso and began working predominantly within a cubist idiom. Already closely linked with Vasconcelos as a member of the wider artistic circle of the Ateneo, Rivera responded to the Minister's rallying call for artists to return to Mexico and rejected cubist abstractionism in favour of a robust and visually coherent style that could theoretically communicate national themes to a predominantly uneducated audience. During the early 1920s, Rivera strived to further align himself with the revolution by claiming to have joined Zapata's

²⁵ Diego Rivera, "Volver a nacer", in *Palabras ilustres, 1886-1921*, eds. Roberto Pliego et al. (Mexico City: Editorial RM, 2007), 367.

forces and to have even colluded to assassinate Díaz.²⁶ These attempts at self-mythification proved effective and by the early 1920s, the muralist was regarded as the living embodiment of the institutionalised revolution within the public sphere. Writing in *El Nacional* in 1922, the journalist Francisco Navarro declared: ‘La revolución tiene en este momento, dos representantes supremos, encarnación viviente de sus ideales: Plutarco Elías Calles en lo político. En la senda del arte, el ventrudo Diego Rivera’.²⁷

As Rivera’s somewhat unlikely biographer, the philosopher Samuel Ramos, pointed out, Rivera’s greatest contribution to Mexican art was ‘tomar como asunto esencial de la pintura al hombre mismo’.²⁸ Building on his initial efforts in *Creación*, a piece I discuss in detail in Chapter Two, Rivera pioneered a revolutionary pictorial idiom structured around the human body that harmonised with contemporary organicist metaphors of national regeneration and the mestizo fantasy of a collective corporeal future based on order, progress and unity. As a collective, the muralists themselves sought to embody these revolutionary corporeal ideals, projecting themselves as ‘hombres de acción, fuertes, sanos’.²⁹ Rivera’s vision of the revolution as a ‘gran fenómeno biológico’, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Three, achieved its clearest expression in his fresco cycle at Chapingo (1924-1927) through a series of visual metaphors interlinking the process of social revolution with the development of human life. Rivera’s highly legible style and mobilisation of the body to articulate myths of collective renewal, unity and progress provided a compelling paradigm of revolutionary art for a new generation of muralists, print makers and illustrators including Xavier Guerrero, Fermín Revueltas, Julio

²⁶ Diego Rivera, *My Life, My Art: An Autobiography (with Gladys March)* (New York: Dover Publications, 1957) 50; Diego Rivera, *Confesiones*, ed. Luis Suárez (Mexico: Editorial Grijalbo, 1975), 111.

²⁷ Francisco Navarro, “México y Diego Rivera”, *El Nacional*, March 2, 1922, 3.

²⁸ Samuel Ramos, *Diego Rivera* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1958), 27.

²⁹ José Clemente Orozco, *Autobiografía* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1999), 64.

Castellanos, Fernando Leal, Agustín Lazo, Ángel Zárraga and Francisco Eppens, whose images flooded the public sphere in the 1920s and 1930s.

During the 1920s, Rivera also set the model for the committed revolutionary artist by cultivating a public image as a ‘receptor, condensador, transmisor y reflector de las aspiraciones, los deseos y las esperanzas de su época’.³⁰ The muralist consolidated his political profile by forming the left-wing artistic collective known as the Sindicato de Obreros Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores with Siqueiros and Xavier Guerrero, and securing his position on the executive committee of the Partido Comunista Mexicano (PCM) in 1923. During the same decade, Rivera also contributed to various left-wing Latin American organisations such as the Hands Off Nicaragua Committee and the Liga Anti-Imperialista de las Américas. While his relationship with the state was often strained, Rivera maintained the strongest institutional links of *los tres grandes* throughout his career. He was entrusted by Vasconcelos with the symbolic task of decorating the interior of the SEP (1923-1928) and continued to receive state commissions under Obregón’s conservative successor Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-1928), whose lack of support for Siqueiros and Orozco prompted their departure to the U.S.

Already a well-established figure within the European avant-garde community, Rivera played a key role in internationalising the muralist movement from the late 1920s onwards through his collaborations with groups such as the Soviet constructivists and European surrealists and through his commissions in the United States. It was in 1929, in the midst of this transitional phase in Rivera’s career that he married Frida Kahlo, a ground-breaking artist (although not fully recognised at the time) and colourful public figure in her own right.³¹ The early years of their relationship were dominated by travel

³⁰ Diego Rivera, “Los patios de la Secretaría de Educación Pública”, in Diego Rivera, *Textos de arte*, ed. Xavier Moyssén Echeverría (Mexico City: UNAM, 1986), 86.

³¹ Rivera was previously married to Angelina Beloff and Guadalupe Marín. He married his art dealer Emma Hurtado in 1955 after Kahlo’s death.

and the couple soon became the focus of international attention. Rivera's U.S. commissions during the 1930s served an important diplomatic function in ameliorating North-South tensions in the wake of the Great Depression; however, his collaborations with capitalist patrons inevitably provoked accusations of ideological inconsistency from his fellow artists. Already in 1929, Rivera had been excommunicated from the PCM for accepting state-funded projects and the directorship of the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes and in 1934 Siqueiros penned a devastating critique of the artist in an article entitled "Rivera's Counter-Revolutionary Road", published in the radical American magazine *New Masses*.³² Alienated from Mexican communists, Stalinists and American capitalists, Rivera found himself politically isolated for much of that decade. The artist would continue to embody the contradictions of the institutionalised revolution into the 1940s. Although Rivera continually projected himself as stridently communist and condemned the use of art to uphold the bourgeois status-quo, he spoke admiringly of the conservative and unapologetically capitalist president Miguel Alemán and accepted his invitation to act as a co-director of the Comisión Nacional de Pintura Mural alongside Orozco and Siqueiros in 1947.³³ Such collaborations demonstrate how, as Greeley argues, later administrations were more concerned with establishing a symbolic alliance with the muralists to uphold the state's revolutionary credentials, than directly funding their artistic projects.³⁴ Even at the height of the *Ruptura* movement in the 1950s, Rivera continued to profess his adherence to the ideological principles of the muralists' 1923 manifesto.³⁵ The artist's unwavering utopianism is conveyed in his final mural *El pueblo en demanda*

³² David Alfaro Siqueiros, "Rivera's Counter-Revolutionary Road", *New Masses* 11, no.9 (1934): 17.

³³ Manuel Espejel y Álvarez, *Miguel Alemán, biografía de su obra: reportaje de la acción constructiva del régimen* (Mexico City: Taller Gráfico de la Nación, 1952), 51.

³⁴ Robin Adèle Greeley, "Muralism and the State in Post-Revolutionary Mexico", in *Mexican Muralism: A Critical History*, eds. Leonard Folgarait et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 27.

³⁵ Diego Rivera, "La cuestión del arte en México", in *Palabras ilustres: 1921-1957* (Mexico City, INBA: Editorial RM, 2007), 305-322.

de salud (1953). Painted a year after he was diagnosed with testicular cancer and four years before his death from heart failure, the mural presents scenes of medical advances from pre-Hispanic Mexico to the present day framed on the left-hand side by a phallic Tree of Life. Although impressive in its technical execution, the mural reveals the thematic and stylistic stagnation of Rivera's later works, which completely eschewed contemporary domestic politics in favour of the well-trodden themes of indigeneity and pan-American cooperation.

Rivera's shift away from the overtly revolutionary subject matter that had dominated his earlier murals can be largely attributed to the inescapable collapse of its social ideals towards the middle of the century. Although Cárdenas's acceleration of land distribution, implementation of social reform and nationalisation of the oil industry established him in the eyes of many as the most faithful interpreter of the revolution's social principles during the 1930s, his administration cemented a corporatist form of government that bound peasant and urban workers' organisations to the state. The election of Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-1946) signaled the transition from Cardenista radicalism to a more moderate interpretation of revolutionary principles based on internal unity and economic progress that laid the foundations for the period of unfettered economic growth known as the 'Mexican miracle' (1940-1968). The trajectory of the revolution during the Alemán administration (1946-1952) and thereafter can be best understood by returning to the term's etymological roots in the Latin verb *revolvere*, meaning to 'roll back'. With the reincarnation of the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM) as the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in 1946, the Revolution entered an 'institutional' phase that witnessed the return to a distinctly Porfirian political model based on political stability, social order and economic development. Embodying the seemingly paradoxical combination of revolution and institutionalism, the PRI began an extended phase of

political hegemony in the 1940s which the Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa would later famously term a 'dictadura perfecta'.³⁶ As modernisation was matched by an ever-deepening class divide under Alemán, it became clear that the events of 1910-1917 had failed to bring about any real change to the economic or social structure of the nation. Increasing economic disparity and the systematic oppression of the working classes led to the proliferation of workers' movements which were forcefully repressed by Alemán and his successor Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (1952-1958). Increasing state repression of popular movements under Adolfo López Mateos (1959-1964) and Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1965-1970) culminated in the government's brutal response to student protesters in the Tlatelolco Massacre of 1968, exposing an irreparable rift between revolutionary rhetoric and reality.

These developments towards the middle of the century resulted in dramatic reassessments of the revolutionary body politic by intellectuals and artists. Already in the late 1940s, the organicist analogies employed by Cárdenas and Lombardo to describe the progressive and unifying impact of the revolution were challenged by the metaphors of corporeal decline used by Mexican intellectuals to describe the collapse of its ideals. In his 1947 essay "La Crisis de México", the economist Daniel Cosío Villegas compared the Revolution to a dying patient '(que) viene padeciendo hace ya algunos años una crisis que se agrava día con día'.³⁷ His language of bodily failure was echoed by sociologist José Iturriaga, who diagnosed the revolution as gravely ill in 1947 and Silva Herzog, who asserted in 1949 that 'la revolución dejó de ser, murió calladamente sin que nadie lo advirtiera'.³⁸ In 1950 the *Excelsior* columnist José R. Colín carried out a final post-

³⁶ Mario Vargas Llosa, "La dictadura perfecta", in *Desafíos a la libertad* (Madrid: El País, 1994), 246.

³⁷ Daniel Cosío Villegas, "La crisis de México", *Cuadernos Americanos* no.33 (1947): 30.

³⁸ José Iturriaga, "México y su crisis histórica", *Cuadernos Americanos* no.33 (May-June 1947): 21-37; Jesús Silva Herzog, "La revolución mexicana es ya un hecho histórico", *Cuadernos Americanos* 47, no.5 (September-October 1949): 10.

mortem analysis in his article “La Revolución Mexicana: R.I.P.”, where he claimed that, like every living phenomenon, the revolution had reached its ‘fin obligado, biológico’.³⁹

Reflecting on the legacy of the revolution in 1950, Paz echoed these metaphors of physiological deterioration by describing post-revolutionary demagoguery as an ‘enfermedad’ in the political system that had generated an atmosphere of distrust amongst intellectuals.⁴⁰ While Cosío Villegas and Herzog debated the disintegration of the revolution’s social and political ideals, thinkers such as Paz moved away from the inflated rhetoric of early post-revolutionary essayists and explored the deeply ingrained insecurities engendered by the nation’s historical experiences. The key precursor to this philosophical project was Samuel Ramos, whose influential essay “El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México” (1934) attempted to comprehend the Mexican condition through a psychoanalytical analysis of the nation’s ‘childhood’ experiences.⁴¹ Ramos’s psychoanalytic personification of the Mexican nation directly foreshadowed Paz’s comparison of Mexico in *El laberinto de la soledad* to an adolescent undergoing a phase of self-interrogation in the aftermath of the upheaval of the revolution.⁴² During the late 1940s and early 1950s this task was undertaken by thinkers linked to the intellectual circle known as the Grupo Hiperión such as Leopoldo Zea, Emilio Uranga, Jorge Portilla and Luis Villoro who adopted existentialist, hermeneutical and phenomenological lenses to engage in a more self-reflexive and introspective exploration of national identity.⁴³ These thinkers were mentored by José Goas, a prominent Spanish intellectual and disciple of José Ortega y Gasset who, along with several liberal *emigrés* who had fled the Spanish

³⁹ José R. Colín, “La Revolución Mexicana: R.I.P.”, *Excelsior*, November 21, 1950, 32.

⁴⁰ Paz, *El laberinto*, 142.

⁴¹ Samuel Ramos, *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* (Buenos Aires: Espasa-Calpe Argentina, 1951).

⁴² Paz, *El laberinto*, 9.

⁴³ Hurtado claims that ‘la filosofía de lo mexicano del Hiperión era, además de una filosofía metafísica, una filosofía orientada a la acción, en particular a la acción liberadora’. Guillermo Hurtado, *El búho y la serpiente: ensayos sobre la filosofía en México en el siglo XX* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2007), 101.

Civil War (1936-1939), profoundly enriched Mexican intellectual life during the 1940s. According to Paz, rather than imposing a particular philosophical doctrine on the people, these thinkers empowered them to create their own: ‘Los nuevos maestros no ofrecen a los jóvenes una filosofía, sino los medios y las posibilidades para crearla’.⁴⁴ As Doremus notes, Uranga and Zea viewed cultural nationalism as an obstruction to self-awareness and change and sought to forge a non-essentialist and universal philosophy.⁴⁵ In this line of thought beginning with Ramos, the Mexican, according to Salmerón, ‘no es sino una entidad modificable y llena de posibilidades que constituyen una responsabilidad común’.⁴⁶ Adopting Ortega y Gasset’s concept of circumstantialism, the Hiperión moved away from totalising definitions of Mexican reality in favour of a historically contingent understanding of *lo mexicano*. As Sánchez and Sánchez explain, for the Hiperión, ‘the task, then, is not to totalise this reality or essentialise it, stripping it of its possibilities, but rather to reveal it as non-static and modifiable, accidental and contingent’.⁴⁷

This wave of intellectual reassessment reverberated in artistic spheres throughout the 1950s. While a reduction in government funding for artistic initiatives resulted in fewer state commissions for the muralists in the 1940s, by this time the heroic and self-assured pictorial idiom of *los tres grandes* had already begun to jar with the socio-political realities of the Camacho and Alemán eras. In line with the Hiperión’s break away from the inauthentic representations of *mexicanidad*, the *Ruptura* artists rejected the sweeping visual rhetoric of the muralists in favour of a more understated mode of expression. Parallel developments became apparent in photographic practices from the 1920s to the

⁴⁴ Paz, *El laberinto*, 145.

⁴⁵ Anne T. Doremus, *Culture, Politics and National Identity in Mexican Literature and Film, 1929-1952* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 159.

⁴⁶ Fernando Salmerón, *Cuestiones educativas y páginas sobre México* (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1980), 179.

⁴⁷ Carlos Alberto Sánchez and Robert Eli Sánchez, Jr., introduction to *Mexican Philosophy in the 20th Century: Essential Readings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), xxxvi.

1950s, with Manuel Álvarez Bravo and his disciples Nacho López and Héctor García crafting what Erica Segre has described as a more provocative visual aesthetic founded on ‘ludic self-reflexivity, experimentation and self-doubt’.⁴⁸ In the domain of cinema, the Nuevo Cine movement emerged in the 1960s to challenge the visual identities established during the cultural nationalist phase of film production known as the ‘Golden Age’ by configuring a more experimental and socially-engaged aesthetic.

The Decline of Muralism and the Rise of Literature

Despite these shifts in visual culture, however, the most significant challenge to the aesthetic model of the muralists was posed by a new generation of mid-century writers. Cuevas situated the *Ruptura* aesthetic within a broader critical intellectual and artistic tradition shaped by figures such as Paz, Fuentes and Carlos Pellicer. Prominent writers such as Paz and José Revueltas reiterated his principal criticisms of the muralist movement.⁴⁹ Writing in 1959, Paz reflected on the development of a new national literature that was defined primarily by its critical stance:

Por arte mexicano se entiende a menudo la pintura. Es cierto que poseemos en esta rama grandes artistas como Rufino Tamayo, al cual, por otra parte he consagrado varios estudios. Pero según mi opinión los talentos más originales aparecen hoy en el sector literario [...] Lo que me parece interesante en la nueva generación es su anticonformismo [...] Nuestra moderna literatura es una literatura crítica.⁵⁰

A number of cultural developments in the 1940s and 1950s provided favourable conditions for this literary revival. The steady growth of the publishing industry, thanks in part to the

⁴⁸ Erica Segre, *Intersected Identities: Strategies of Visualisation in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Mexican Culture* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), 158.

⁴⁹ José Luis Cuevas, “La Cortina Del Nopal”, in *Ruptura 1952-1965: catálogo de la exposición, Museo de Arte Alvar y Carmen T. de Carrillo Gil* (Mexico City: Museo Carrillo Gil, 1988), 91; Paz, “Los muralistas a primera vista”; José Revueltas, “Escuela Mexicana de Pintura y novela de la revolución”, in *Cuestionamientos e intenciones* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1978), 241-274;

⁵⁰ Octavio Paz, “En París, encuentro con Octavio Paz: fue la nuestra la primera Revolución del siglo”, interview by Claude Couffon, *La Gaceta del Fondo de Cultura Económica* 55, no. 9 (March 1959): 5-6.

assistance of recently arrived Spanish *emigré* intellectuals along with increasing facilities for higher education and the expansion of the middle class, provided great opportunities for the dissemination and reception of literature. The arrival of literary magazines such as *Revista Mexicana de la Literatura*, founded by Fuentes and Emmanuel Carballo in 1955, and other journals such as *Novedades*, *Siempre* and *México en la cultura* opened new spaces for writers and literary commentators to contribute to debates on Mexican culture and nationalism.

By the end of the decade, literature's dethronement of the visual arts had become a topic of discussion in critical circles. In his 1959 article "Literatura contra pintura: La pintura mexicana a la zaga de la literatura", Antonio Rodríguez writes:

Asistimos pues, en estos momentos a un desplazamiento de posiciones rectoras. Hace treinta años la pintura dominaba al conjunto [...] En tanto que la pintura se ha vuelto anodina, sorda y muda, la literatura comienza a hablar, y a hablar con vigor, asumiendo ahora la actitud heroica que aquella ya no se siente muy dispuesta a mantener.⁵¹

Pointing to key figures such as Rulfo and Juan José Arreola, Rodríguez echoes Paz in attributing the increasing relevance of literature to its social engagement with 'los problemas actuales, palpitantes y candentes del país'.⁵² This more critical mode of literary expression had started to take form during the 1940s with the publication of José Revueltas's *El luto humano* (1943) and Agustín Yáñez's *Al filo del agua* (1947). Mirroring the psychoanalytic dimension of Ramos's inquiry, these writers utilised interior monologue and multiple perspectives to create psychologically complex portraits of provincial communities before and after the revolution. These innovations laid the foundations for the works of a new generation of writers from the 1950s onwards including Rulfo, Fuentes, Rosario Castellanos and Elena Garro, who rejected the realist style adopted

⁵¹ Antonio Rodríguez, "Literatura contra pintura: La pintura mexicana a la zaga de la literatura", *Claridades Literarias: Suplemento Cultural de los Jueves*, April 30, 1959, 2.

⁵² Rodríguez, "Literatura contra pintura", 2.

by earlier narrators of the revolution such as Mariano Azuela and Martín Luis Guzmán and drew from the narrative strategies of Anglo-American modernists to communicate a more indirect critique of its failings.

For Fuentes, Rulfo's lyrical and deeply metaphorical novel marked a decisive turning point in this cycle of novels focusing on the revolution, closing 'con llave de oro' the realist phase initiated by Azuela.⁵³ Fuentes situates Rulfo's contribution within a broader shift in twentieth-century Spanish American letters towards a more interrogative mode: 'se inicia un tránsito del simplismo épico a la complejidad dialéctica, de la seguridad de las respuestas a la impugnación de las preguntas'.⁵⁴ In line with the more self-reflexive stance towards national issues adopted by contemporary thinkers, and particularly those of the Hiperión circle, Rulfo's anti-narrative literary aesthetic founded on fragmentation, ambiguity and ellipsis encouraged Mexicans to actively re-read and reconfigure the nation's post-revolutionary narrative. For Monsiváis, this participative aspect of Rulfo's work marked the development of a truly democratic style of literary expression: 'al no consentir ninguna Interpretación Definitiva, obliga a la renovación democrática de las constancias de lectura'.⁵⁵ By repeatedly insisting on this anti-didactic aspect of his work, Rulfo seemed to consciously rail against the totalising political statements that had characterised art of the previous decades, and particularly the works of the muralists. Although the writer admitted his opposition to the PRI, he never aligned himself with any political party and professed his total ignorance of political matters.⁵⁶ In his typically evasive manner, the writer simultaneously hinted at and denied the existence of any political content in his work:

⁵³ Carlos Fuentes, *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* (Mexico: Editorial Joaquín Mortiz, 1969), 15.

⁵⁴ Fuentes, *La nueva novela*, 13.

⁵⁵ Carlos Monsiváis, "Sí, tampoco los muertos retoñan. Desgraciadamente", in Federico Campbell, *La ficción de la memoria: Juan Rulfo ante la crítica* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2003), 187.

⁵⁶ Juan Rulfo, "Juan Rulfo examina su narrativa", in *Toda la obra*, ed. Claude Fell (Paris: ALLCA XX, 1996), 459.

No quise hacer una literatura social, no fue afán de denunciar, menos de testimoniar un hecho, simplemente la forma en que han caído o han quedado ciertos sitios después de la llamada “Revolución Mexicana”. Debido a esto se me ha llamado a veces anti-revolucionario [...] a mí la Revolución Mexicana no me interesa, ni me interesa en sí si fue buena o fue mala. Como no viví esa Revolución, no conocí sus consecuencias, ni las conozco todavía.⁵⁷

Despite Rulfo’s professed lack of interest in the revolution’s outcomes, the surreal dreamscapes depicted in his texts are unmistakably rooted in a bleak post-revolution environment. Writing in the 1960s, John Brushwood claimed that it was impossible ‘to understand recent Mexican fiction without knowing that the country had passed through a social revolution that did not create utopia’.⁵⁸ By presenting a cast of debilitated, spectral and grotesque *campesinos*, Rulfo’s literature echoes the revisionist assessments of Cosío Villegas and others by articulating the collapse of revolutionary utopianism in primarily bodily terms. The corporeal language of societal crisis developed in these works from the mid-1950s would find echoes in the literature of Garro and Castellanos and most powerfully in the eponymous protagonist of Carlos Fuentes’s novel *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962), whose degenerating body metonymically stands in for the failed revolutionary nation.

The disturbing portrait of rural life presented in Rulfo’s literature was inspired by his own traumatic childhood, which unfolded against the violent backdrop of the Cristero War (1926-1929). Rulfo was born into a family of wealthy landowners in 1917 in southern Jalisco, although the precise location of his birth remains somewhat nebulous. Following the death of his father in 1923, Rulfo was sent to an orphanage in Guadalajara along with his brother Severiano, where he would learn of the death of his mother four years later. In 1935 Rulfo moved to Mexico City and secured an undemanding job as an archivist in the

⁵⁷ Cited in Alberto Vital Díaz, *Noticias sobre Juan Rulfo, 1784-2003* (Mexico City: Ediciones RM: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2004), 206.

⁵⁸ John Brushwood, *Mexico in Its Novel: A Nation's Search for Identity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966), 16.

Office of Immigration that enabled him to devote his time to writing and to immerse himself in the intellectual and artistic milieu of the capital. It was this same year that Rivera completed his long-awaited triptych at the Palacio Nacional (PN), an epic visual narrative of Mexican history that remains the single most significant piece of visual propaganda to be funded by the Mexican government. Although Rulfo's lack of qualifications prevented him from enrolling at university, he attended lectures delivered at the UNAM by prominent thinkers such as Antonio Caso, Vicente Lombardo Toledano and the art historian Justino Fernández and attended gatherings with the artists and writers of the Contemporáneos group, who fervidly opposed the cultural nationalism of the muralists.⁵⁹

After working in the immigration office in Guadalajara from 1941 to 1947, Rulfo returned to Mexico City, where he began working for the tyre manufacturers Goodrich Euzkadi and married Clara Aparicio, with whom he had four children. While travelling across the country as an itinerant salesman for Goodrich, Rulfo honed his skills as a photographer and succeeded in publishing his first works in the company's magazine *Caminos de México*, and *Mapa*, the official publication of the Asociación Mexicana Automovilística.⁶⁰ Rulfo's literary career was transformed by the receipt of two grants from the Centro Mexicano de Escritores (CME), founded by Margaret Shedd with support from the Rockefeller Foundation, which enabled him to publish *LL* and *PP* and brought him into contact with future literary luminaries such as Juan José Arreola, Rosario Castellanos, Emmanuel Carballo and Jorge Portilla. Although both works received a mixed initial reception, they soon cemented the writer's status within Mexico's literary firmament. Rulfo would subsequently become something of a spectre on the literary scene. Although he continually alluded to two literary works in progress to appease journalists

⁵⁹ Steven Boldy, *A Companion to Juan Rulfo* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2016), 13.

⁶⁰ Boldy, *A Companion to Juan Rulfo*, 17.

during the 1960s, a novel entitled *La cordillera* and a short story collection called *Días sin floresta*, neither were published. Rulfo entered a period of financial hardship following the publication of *PP* but managed to survive as a result of financial assistance from the Colegio de México from 1956 to 1958 and by securing short-term positions at the Comisión del Papaloapan in Veracruz (1955-1956), the library of the Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística (1958-1959) and the state-sponsored television station Televicentro in Guadalajara (1960 to 1962). During the 1960s, Rulfo found an alternative creative outlet in cinema, but devoted himself primarily to anthropology. The writer joined the Publications Department of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) in 1962 and continued to work there until his death.

Reading Rivera and Rulfo Together

Rivera's and Rulfo's professional biographies reflect the complex and often contradictory links that developed between thinkers and the Mexican state during this historical period. Like many of the nation's most notable societal commentators in the twentieth century, both artists projected their visions of the revolution's outcomes, both optimistic and sceptical, while working within the folds of the post-revolutionary regime. While Rivera closely aligned himself with the government towards the beginning and end of his career, Rulfo occupied a more marginal position within the state apparatus, assuming minor bureaucratic roles to sustain his literary career and his family. Rulfo's unlikely employment history reflects Nicola Miller's assertion that:

Spanish American intellectuals remained bound up with the interventionist state even when they defined themselves in opposition to it – not only because they were often dependent upon it for employment, but also because it offered the only route to the realization of their visions.⁶¹

⁶¹ Nicola Miller, *In the Shadow of the State: Intellectuals and the Quest for National Identity in Twentieth-century Spanish America* (London: Verso, 1999), 6.

Rulfo was by no means an exception in this regard. Paz, who advocated a critical function on the part of the intellectual, held a string of diplomatic posts, while Yáñez worked as a speech writer for president Adolfo López Mateos and Fuentes served as ambassador to France under Luis Echeverría (1970-1976). Aside from demonstrating the professional links that continued to bind artists to the state, these collaborations underline the extent to which artistic, intellectual and political activity were fundamentally intertwined after the revolution. For Fuentes, this politicisation of the role of the artist was an inevitable result of the lack of a functioning civil society. ‘En un país sin información oportuna o verdadera’, he states, ‘la cultura llena el vacío. Una línea de Octavio Paz dice más que todos los ramplones discursos del PRI’.⁶² The sheer number of post-revolutionary artists and writers who contributed to debates on national issues highlights the need for a sufficiently broad definition of the intellectual in this historical context as ‘almost anyone who writes, paints, acts, teaches and speaks out’, to borrow Jorge Castañeda’s formulation. In evaluating Rivera’s and Rulfo’s specific contributions in this regard, Goldfarb’s definition of intellectuals as ‘those who use their expertise, their access to special knowledge, and their capacity to manipulate symbols, for broader purposes’ is perhaps the most useful for my purposes.⁶³ Over the course of their careers, both artists cultivated a profound awareness of Mexican culture and history that would shape their creative output. An inexhaustible public speaker and prolific writer, Rivera established himself as an outspoken commentator on Mexican art, politics and architecture in the public sphere from the 1920s to the 1940s. Despite insisting on his anti-intellectualism, Rulfo also amassed a substantial body of writings on topics as diverse as painting, photography, history, architecture and anthropology. Throughout the thesis, I demonstrate how this ‘special

⁶² Carlos Fuentes, “Aclarar los humos del pasado, volver el pasado presentable”, interview by Margarita García Flores, *La cultura en México*, August 27, 1969: iii.

⁶³ Jeffrey Goldfarb, *Civility and Subversion: The Intellectual in Democratic Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 30.

knowledge' informs their aesthetic visions. In focusing on the corporeal nature of the 'symbols' used by both artists to articulate their respective interpretations of the revolution and its legacy, I explore how this core trope of the revolutionary imaginary is forged and dismantled over the course of three decades.

Body Politics

The use of organicist metaphors to conceptualise social organisation and the distribution of power has deep historical roots in western philosophical thought. First developed in Plato's *Republic* (381 BC) and restated by Aristotle in his *Politics* (350 BC), the analogy of the body politic again provided the structural basis for the political theories proposed by medieval Catholic theologians such as Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, who conceived society as a unified body of hierarchically and interdependently arranged social organs. The body politic trope emerged again in modern discourses on state formation such as Hobbes's discussion of the formation of the commonwealth in *Leviathan* (1651) and in Herbert Spencer's Lamarckian conception of society as an evolving living organism during the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

During the latter half of the twentieth century, theorists working with the field of cultural studies began to reassess the political status of the body, focusing not on its function as a metaphorical expression of socio-political structures, but rather on its position within various societal power networks. Responses to this question have been so numerous and varied in their theoretical and disciplinary approaches that Terry Eagleton declared that there would soon be 'more bodies in contemporary criticism than on the fields of Waterloo'.⁶⁴ This 'corporeal turn' was inaugurated in the 1970s with Michel

⁶⁴ Terry Eagleton, "Peter Brooks on Bodies", in *Figures of Dissent: Critical Essays on Fish, Spivak, Žižek and Others* (London: Verso, 2003), 129.

Foucault's influential account of the disciplinary mechanisms regulating individual bodies ('anatomy-politics of the human body') and entire population-species ('biopolitics'). Foucault's projection of the body as an 'inscribed surface of events' paved the way for feminist inquiries into the discursive production of gender by Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray and, later, Judith Butler. The postmodernist interpretation of the body as a social construct proposed by Foucault and Butler was contested by theorists looking to redirect attention to the sensuous 'lived' body such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Pierre Bourdieu. The field of body studies has provided particularly fertile ground for revaluations of female corporeality by thinkers such as Julia Kristeva and Elizabeth Grosz, who followed the work of Mary Douglas in exploring the dangers located on the margins and boundaries of the body. Challenging the docility of the Foucauldian subject, Grosz insisted upon the unfixity of the body and its transformative capacity: 'As a political object, the body is not inert or fixed [...] If it is a social object, the body can be redefined, its forms and functions can be contested and its place in culture reevaluated or transformed'.⁶⁵

Despite the significant divergences between these theoretical perspectives, they share a common concern with the inherently political nature of the body. *Post-Revolutionary Body Politics* departs from the logical assumption that artistic representations of the body, like their material counterparts, are not neutral but are inevitably inscribed within certain power dynamics. Following Grosz's interpretation of the body as a locus for the construction and contestation of meaning, the four chapters of this thesis examine Rivera's and Rulfo's allegorisations of the body within the specific

⁶⁵ Elizabeth Grosz, "Notes Towards a Corporeal Feminism", *Australian Feminist Studies* no. 5 (Summer, 1987), 3.

historical context of their production to demonstrate how they function as sites for the inscription and reconfiguration of certain narratives of revolutionary nationhood.

My discussion is guided by the following questions: What aesthetic and symbolic languages are used to compose these bodies? What conditions contributed to their formation? What can they tell us, more broadly, about how the concepts of revolution and nation were interpreted and narrated in political, intellectual and cultural terms during these periods? To answer these questions, I engage with multiple (aesthetic, figurative, literal and metaphorical) bodies in my discussion. Locating Rivera's and Rulfo's visual and textual representations of the body within the larger ambit of cultural debates on post-revolutionary identity, I examine how these images engage with and respond to the corporeal metaphors that were employed by contemporary intellectuals and politicians to conceptualise the ideas of revolution and nation.⁶⁶ By applying Foucault's concept of biopolitics, I also examine the relationship between these aesthetic and metaphorical bodies and the physiological and behavioural ideals that were imposed on the bodies of real Mexican citizens through the public health campaigns of the post-revolutionary state after 1920. By establishing these connections, the thesis aims to provide greater insight into the political agendas underpinning the works of both artists and to shed light on the broader 'body politics' of the post-revolution period: the centrality of bodies, both metaphorical and material, to political, artistic and intellectual formulations of nationhood during these years.

In my readings of Rivera's and Rulfo's works, I explore how the body functions as a key site for the articulation of ideological and aesthetic concerns, either by upholding

⁶⁶ While the organicist discourses of the *científicos* provide the most immediate precedent for these tropes, they can be contextualised within a longer historical tradition of body politic metaphors in Mexico. Alfredo López Austin has highlighted the centrality of the body to cosmogony and forms of political organisation in Nahuatl society, while Alejandro Cañeque has documented how the metaphor of the body served as a model for colonial political structures in New Spain during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Details of both works are included in the bibliography.

or destabilising certain interpretations of national identity or raising questions about the very possibility of narrativising the revolution and its legacy. In relation to this second point, I am particularly interested in how the chosen media of both artists enable them to present the body in varying degrees of realism. Rivera's use of the body as a symbolic carrier for national themes must be understood in light of the didactic objectives of the muralist movement. If, as Benedict Anderson writes, the concepts of 'nation, nationality, nationalism [...] have proved notoriously difficult to define', the universal accessibility of the body as a metaphor of identity provides perhaps the most powerful means of visualising our 'imagined communities'.⁶⁷ As we accept the body as 'an irreducible sign of the natural, the given, the unquestionable', corporeal images possess a unique capacity to naturalise particular socio-political structures or sets of relations.⁶⁸ As a propagandistic device, the image of the body thus provided Rivera with an effective and efficient means of communicating a set of new societal values to a broad social audience and presenting these concepts as inherent and self-evident. By fashioning a coherent visual idiom from elements of European classicism and social realism, and integrating both real historical bodies and longstanding nationalist bodily tropes into his works, the muralist consistently maximised the legibility of the body as a symbolic carrier. With this in mind, I explore how the Riveran body, to borrow Foucault's phrasing, can be read as 'an inscribed surface of events' in relation to contemporary nation-building discourses. By fully contextualising his works within the complex historical context of their production, I demonstrate how Rivera's formal preoccupation with corporeal fixity, unity and discipline speaks to wider anxieties regarding the future of the post-revolutionary nation in political and intellectual

⁶⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 3.

⁶⁸ Annette Kuhn, "The Body and Cinema: Some Problems for Feminism", in *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, eds. Katie Conboy et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 199.

circles during the 1920s and 1930s. Alongside the optimistic rhetoric of the ateneístas and leftist intellectuals such as Lombardo Toledano, the muralist's corporeal utopianism was fundamentally aspirational, articulating the possibilities of a revolutionary process that had not yet come to fruition in the 1920s and 1930s. Furthermore, despite projecting the body as a site for collective revolutionary transformation, Rivera's insistence on the principles of unity, order and progress in his composition of individual and collective bodies exposes a paradoxical line of continuity with Porfirian interpretations of the social organism, something I highlight at different points throughout the thesis.

Rivera's reliance on corporeal images to stabilise notions of revolutionary nationhood in the precarious years that followed the armed conflict supports Elaine Scarry's claim that in moments of societal crisis, the 'sheer material factualness' of the human body is harnessed to imbue even the most fragile cultural constructs with an aura or 'realness' and 'certainty'.⁶⁹ As Sue Best warns, however, it is precisely when the body is invoked as a means of stabilising a particular ideological construction that it is most vulnerable to reformulations. Following from Douglas's claim that that boundaries of the body 'can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious', she asserts that:

The use of the body-model indicates the demand or desire for a clear limit or boundary - it seems to bestow, or at least to promise, precisely this - and yet it is when the body is invoked that the boundary is probably most uncertain.⁷⁰

As literature emerged as the dominant artistic medium in Mexico during the middle of the century, writers began to expose the precariousness of the corporeal models that had previously been constructed in the visual sphere. Focusing on their descriptions of corporeal fragmentation, spectrality and animalisation, I explore how Rulfo's literary

⁶⁹ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 31.

⁷⁰ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2018), 116; Sue Best, "Sexualizing Space", in *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism*, eds. Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn (London: Routledge, 1995), 183.

works dramatise this gradual unfixing of the utopian national body that was constructed by Rivera and others during the early post-revolution period. If, as Rivera's biographer Bertram Wolfe claimed, the muralist 'painted what the Revolution should be, what it should have become', Rulfo's corporeal imagery unrelentingly confronts us with the realities of its outcomes from a disenchanted mid-century viewpoint.⁷¹ Rulfo's attempt to re-write the revolutionary narrative through a process of corporeal decomposition and unfixing suggests certain affinities with the subversive grotesque body described by Mikhail Bakhtin. In *Rabelais and his World* (1965), Bakhtin delineates the relationship between bodily forms and discursive structures operating in society: while the disciplined and harmoniously proportioned classical body of the Renaissance represents regulated systems incorporating discourses relating to law, philosophy and theology, the unstable and fluctuating grotesque body subverts the normative order and offers up a non-hegemonic discursive space that can be used for the construction of alternative narratives.⁷² By situating Rulfo's works within the revisionist decades of the 1950s and 1960s, I consider how the grotesque indeterminacy of the Rulfian body opens up the possibility of reconfiguring and reimagining the national image. In addition to highlighting how Rulfo's literary works dramatically redraw the boundaries of the body through descriptions of corporeal decomposition and overflow, I also break new ground by examining how the underexplored elusive human subjects of his photographs play an equally subversive role in destabilising narratives of post-revolutionary utopianism. Like his literary texts, these works call into question the body's stability as a site of meaning by problematising its legibility. I argue that, in keeping with the mid-century spirit of

⁷¹ Bertram Wolfe, *The Fabulous Life of Diego Rivera* (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1968), 160.

⁷² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1968).

scepticism, Rulfo's corpus signals a shift from a didactic to an interrogative body aesthetic, that opens up questions regarding national identity rather than providing answers.

Although, as W.T. Mitchell argues 'there are no "purely" visual or verbal arts', it is important to consider how the broad distinctions between these forms contribute to Rivera's and Rulfo's distinct corporeal imaginaries.⁷³ Echoing the spatial-temporal distinction between painting and poetry proposed by Lessing, Arnheim asserts that 'a pictorial image presents itself whole, in simultaneity. A successful literary image grows through what one might call accretion by amendment'.⁷⁴ On the level of corporeal representation, these general distinctions suggest why the static and total nature of the visual image might prove most effective for articulating absolutist depictions of the body politic and why, as Hillman and Maude assert, the mutable and fluctuating nature of literary representation has made it the preferred medium for pre-modern and modern representations of its collapse into dysfunction. It is this 'unbinding of all kinds of fixity', they argue, that establishes the literary body as 'a locus of socio-political resistance'.⁷⁵ By attending to the specific formal dimensions of Rivera's and Rulfo's visual and textual works, my readings explore not just why but also *how* the national body transitions from a state of stability and totality to one of breakdown and flux within the artistic sphere from the 1920s to the 1960s.

By examining the political significance of corporeal representations in literature and the visual arts, this project contributes to a burgeoning interest in the position of the body within post-revolutionary national reconstruction and development efforts. Two important studies highlighting the impact of nation-building strategies on lived Mexican

⁷³ W.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 4-5.

⁷⁴ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay Upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. Ellen Frothingham (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1887); Rudolf Arnheim, *Visual Thinking* (London: Faber, 1970), 249.

⁷⁵ David Hillman and Ulrika Maude, introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to The Body in Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 5-6.

bodies are Elsa Muñiz's *Cuerpo, representación y poder: México en los albores de la reconstrucción nacional, 1920-1934* (2002), which focuses on the construction of gendered identities through state-sponsored health initiatives and discourses, and Beatriz Urias Horcasitas's *Historias secretas del racismo en México (1920-1950)* (2007), which outlines the eugenics initiatives relating to racial homogenisation, mental hygiene and criminology that were implemented by the Mexican state. While these studies underscore the centrality of the body to the project of nation-formation, curiously little scholarly attention has been paid to the bodies crowding Mexico's post-revolutionary artistic and literary landscapes. To date, the only work to focus specifically on pictorial representations of the post-revolutionary body is *Formando el cuerpo de la nación: el imaginario del deporte en el México posrevolucionario (1920-1940)* (2012), a short catalogue produced by the curator and scholar Dafne Cruz Porchini to accompany an exhibition of the same title held at the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes in 2012. The four essays included in this publication assess visual portrayals of athletic bodies by artists such as Rivera, Zárraga, Eppens and others, in the context of the post-revolutionary physical culture promoted between 1920 and 1940. *Post-Revolutionary Body Politics* builds significantly on this work by examining how the bodily images produced by Rivera and other artists intersected with multiple aspects of the nation-building project.

The interactions between visual art, power and national identity during the early post-revolution period have received increasing scholarly attention in recent years. In *Crafting Mexico* (2010), Rick A. López examines the contribution of popular arts to the construction of an ethnically inclusive national identity from the 1920s to the 1940s. More recently, the intersection of art and political activism during the first half of the twentieth century has provided the focus for John Lear's *Picturing the Proletariat: Artists and Labor in Revolutionary Mexico, 1908–1940* (2017) and Stefanie Smith's *The Power and Politics*

of Art in Post-revolutionary Mexico (2017). Mary Kay Coffey's *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture: Murals, Museums and the Mexican State* (2012) offers the most sophisticated and theoretically informed analysis of the muralist movement to date. Focusing on the later period of mural production from the mid-1930s to the 1960s, Coffey examines the exchanges between the didactic muralist movement and museum culture. Coffey argues that muralism was ultimately transformed into a tool of state propaganda but also highlights the internal tensions and contradictions that characterised the project and its relationship with the regime. Like earlier works by Leonard Folgarait (1998) and David Craven (2002), however, Coffey's wide-ranging study only summarises Rivera's contribution within a broader evaluation of the contribution of *los tres grandes*. While studies focusing exclusively on Rivera by Desmond Rochfort (1987) and Andrea Kettenmann (1997) have compensated for this lack of breadth, their content has been more descriptive than analytical. As a corrective to these approaches, the present thesis will provide close and highly contextualised readings of both canonical and previously overlooked works produced by Rivera during the 1920s and 1930s. Rather than interpret Rivera's work simply as an aesthetic conduit for official state ideology, I examine how it intersects with various contemporary intellectual, political and artistic currents. Building on the analytical approach adopted by Coffey and the contributors to Greeley's and Folgarait's edited volume *Mexican Muralism: A Critical History* (2012), I also attend to the unique spatial dimensions of muralism to examine how Rivera's works engage the material body of the viewer to achieve their didactic objectives.

In recent years, scholarship on Latin American literature has itself undergone something of a somatic turn, with scholars such as Susan Antebi (2009), Kristin E. Pitt (2010), Olivia Vázquez-Medina (2013) and Bruce Dean Willis (2013) examining textual bodies from a range of theoretical perspectives. To date, the only study to analyse imagery

of the body in post-revolutionary Mexican literature is Rebecca Janzen's *The National Body in Mexican Literature: Collective Challenges to Biopolitical Control* (2015). In this work, Janzen interprets the sick and disabled characters depicted in works written by Rulfo, Castellanos, Revueltas and Vicente Leñero as evidence of the dehumanising influence of the state, considering how these bodies might collectively challenge its exclusionary power. In her chapter dedicated to *PP*, Janzen contends that the contamination of Comala's townsfolk by Páramo's 'bad blood' establishes fluid connections between characters that enable them to mount a collective challenge to the *cacique*. My project shares Janzen's fundamental concern with the subversive nature of Rulfo's literary bodies, but differs in its disciplinary and chronological scope. As Janzen's study focuses exclusively on the use of corporeal tropes in literary works produced between 1940 and 1980, the interartistic and broad historical framework of *Post-Revolutionary Body Politics* offers an extensively expanded discussion of how the image of the body was mobilised for political purposes across Rulfo's entire corpus, and in post-revolutionary artistic production more broadly.

In exploring how Rulfo's works contest certain state-authorised discourses of nationhood, my study develops a line of inquiry initiated by Ignacio Sánchez Prado in *Naciones intelectuales* (2009), which examines 'la producción de estrategias intelectuales contrahegemónicas' in Mexican literature from 1917 to 1959.⁷⁶ Sánchez Prado claims that while the cultural and educational campaigns of the 1920s constructed a new identity for the nation, literature sought 'nuevas formas de imaginar la relación entre Estado, cultura y cuerpo político'.⁷⁷ Despite making an explicit reference to the 'body politic', Sánchez Prado does not consider how this concept manifests itself on a symbolic level in the works

⁷⁶ Ignacio Sánchez Prado, *Naciones intelectuales: las fundaciones de la modernidad literaria mexicana, 1917-1959* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2009), 5.

⁷⁷ Sánchez Prado, *Naciones intelectuales*, 26.

of these writers. While, like Janzen, Sánchez Prado claims that literature provided ‘espacios alternativos de imaginación de la nación’ to those created by visual media such as muralism and cinema, he does not discuss these earlier aesthetic models in depth.⁷⁸ Working within a similar timeframe, this thesis significantly extends the scope of Sánchez Prado’s study by tracing an arc in artistic and literary production and its links with intellectual activity from 1920 to 1965. Curiously, Rulfo does not feature among the ranks of writers discussed in *Naciones intelectuales* who challenged the ‘imaginarios hegemónicos’ constructed during the post-revolutionary period.⁷⁹ Here, I position Rulfo at the forefront of this revisionist literary movement by illustrating how his treatment of the body consistently undermines dominant narratives of revolutionary nationhood.

The most important recent contribution to Rulfian scholarship is Amit Thakkar’s *The Fiction of Juan Rulfo: Irony, Revolution and Postcolonialism* (2012), a monograph that examines Rulfo’s work through the prism of post-colonial theory. By demonstrating how Rulfo’s irony operates in relation to the rhetoric of the post-revolutionary state, Thakkar affirms the need for a historicist approach to his work – something I maintain in this thesis. My line of inquiry diverges from Thakkar’s project, however, by contending that this challenge to state rhetoric is primarily articulated through the depiction of the body in Rulfo’s work. While Thakkar briefly gestures to the imagery of the muralists as a counterpoint to Rulfo’s descriptions at a number of points, these comparisons are not fully developed. Establishing a sustained dialogue between Rivera’s and Rulfo’s works, the thesis will provide a more comprehensive account of the historical cultural context that helped shape the latter’s aesthetic. Furthermore, I build considerably on Thakkar’s intervention by examining how these political concerns manifest themselves across

⁷⁸ Ibid., 16.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 4.

Rulfo's entire *oeuvre*. While the contributors to the edited collection *Rethinking Juan Rulfo's Creative World: Prose, Photography, Film* (2016) widened the lens of Rulfian studies by considering his experimentation with visual media, analyses of the content and form of his photographic and cinematic works, rather than the historical and biographical context of their production, remain thin on the ground. The thesis makes an important contribution to Rulfian scholarship by examining how the formal components of Rulfo's photographs, much like his literary texts, perform a political function by eliciting a critical and self-reflexive response from the viewer.

The studies surveyed thus far reflect a pervasive tendency in current academic criticism to examine the politics of post-revolutionary artistic production from exclusively art-historical or literary perspectives. This thesis represents the first attempt to engage in a sustained comparison of literary and visual artworks produced during the tumultuous four decades that followed the armed revolution. Through the use of an interdisciplinary framework encompassing muralism, painting, illustration, literature, photography and cinema, the study will provide a wide-ranging and much-needed cartography of post-revolutionary artistic production. In establishing a sustained dialogue between visual and verbal forms, my project builds on Lois Parkinson Zamora's *The Inordinate Eye* (2006), which follows the development of baroque aesthetics in Spanish America through a combined analysis of painting, sculpture, architecture, and literature from the pre-conquest period to the present day. For Zamora, the application of such an interdisciplinary methodology is demanded by the profound historical links between visual and textual modes of communication in Spanish America dating back to the logogrammatical systems of the Maya.

The use of a multimedia archive is equally essential for my project of examining the cultural context of post-revolution Mexico, a period in which changing social

conditions, most importantly literacy, altered the dynamics of artistic production and consumption. Such a methodological approach is further necessitated by the interartistic nature of post-revolutionary cultural production, which saw multiple collaborations between visual and literary practitioners, with the most notable examples being the *estridentistas* and the *contemporáneos*. Moreover, artists and thinkers consistently contributed to debates outside their discipline and painting, photography and literature were frequently compared within debates on national culture. Rivera and Rulfo are prime examples of this mobility of media. Hailed as the ‘poeta épico’ of the muralist movement, Rivera stated that his visual narratives at the SEP had been inspired by Azuela’s prose and frequently incorporated textual elements into his murals such as lyrics and political banners to clarify their narrative content.⁸⁰ For his part, Rulfo, a photographer and cineaste who wrote knowledgeably about the work of *Ruptura* artists such as Coronel and Alberto Gironella, infused his literature with such a rich visual texture that early reviewers of the novel described him as a painter.⁸¹

By assessing the creative output of Rulfo as a writer, photographer and cineaste and Rivera as painter, architect and theorist of art, the thesis aims to provide a more complete understanding of their aesthetic visions and broader artistic trends and debates during their periods. Furthermore, a comparative reading of these corpora enables me to generate new readings of both canonical and lesser-known works that throw into relief the unique formal qualities of their respective media. Setting these comparative readings within a chronologically broad framework, the thesis provides the first diachronic

⁸⁰ Isidro Fabela, “Diego Rivera: Ensayo en miniatura”, in *Diego Rivera y los escritores: Antología tributaria*, 37; Xavier Moyssén Echeverría, *La crítica de arte en México, 1896-1921* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1999), 267.

⁸¹ Rubén Salazar Mallén, “El mensaje en la obra”, *El Universal*, June 21, 1955, 3; Renato Molina Enríquez, “Un libro de México: *Pedro Páramo*”, *Boletín Bibliográfico de la Secretaría de la Hacienda* no. 41 (August 1955): 2; Elena Poniatowska, “Charlando con Juan Rulfo: Voz de la Tierra en Llamas”, *Excelsiór*, January 15, 1954, 7.

examination of Mexico's evolving post-revolutionary intellectual and cultural landscapes from the 1920s to the 1960s. Rather than examine Rivera's and Rulfo's corpora in a vacuum, I embed my readings within wider debates on national identity to explore how their works responded and contributed to a particular climate of ideas during their respective periods. Identifying and analysing the treatment of common themes in their works sheds light on how specific aspects of post-revolutionary national identity continued to preoccupy intellectuals and artists and the extent to which perspectives on these concepts evolved.

The thesis is divided thematically into four chapters, each of which are composed of two subsections. In each chapter, I engage in close readings of specific visual and literary texts, setting my analysis against a detailed historical backdrop drawn from print media, correspondence and previously unexamined archival materials. By examining these representations through a range of theoretical lenses, *Post-Revolutionary Body Politics* traverses a theoretical history of the body, from Foucault's discussion of the disciplinary strategies introduced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the alternative resistant corporealities imagined by Deleuze and Guattari in response to twentieth-century capitalism. Across the four chapters, the thesis follows a broad evolution in representations of the body, as it transitions from a state of stability, legibility and cohesion in Rivera's murals and illustrations in the 1920s and 1930s to one of precariousness, ambiguity and flux in Rulfo's literary, cinematic and photographic works post-1950. By situating this process of corporeal transformation within the specific historical context of these decades, I argue that the body can be viewed as a central symbolic field for understanding and exploring post-revolutionary intellectual, cultural and political change.

Chapter One centres on the theme of collective memory and the narratives of political and ethnic unity that were constructed in the decades following the conflict's military phase. The first section of the chapter examines how the literal and figurative historical bodies presented in Rivera's and Rulfo's works reflect evolving historiographical perspectives on the revolution from the 1920s to the 1950s by endorsing or problematising the notion of a unified and intelligible historical narrative. The second section turns to the myths of ethnic solidarity that were promoted through the indigenista movement. I examine how Rivera's murals and Rulfo's photographs propose alternative ways of visualising the indigenous body that shed light on broader shifts in intellectual debates on indigenous and mestizo identity during this period.

Chapters Two and Three draw on Foucault's theorisation of biopolitics to consider how the Porfirian ideals of 'orden y progreso' were paradoxically projected onto real and imaginary Mexican bodies after 1920. Chapter Two traces the rise and fall of the state's citizen-formation project by examining the relationship between architectural and anatomical forms in Rivera's and Rulfo's works. I read these images in the specific historical context of the post-revolutionary state's efforts to create a rational and disciplined populace through the implementation of social engineering strategies and a disciplinary functionalist mode of public architecture. The first section of the chapter examines how Rivera articulates the post-revolutionary 'return to order' by configuring a rational architectonic human body and by drawing on functionalist architectural concepts to establish a link between spatial and bodily discipline in his muralism. In the second part I explore how these ideals of bodily and spatial stability and order are unsettled in Rulfo's novel and mid-century photographs of Mexico City, which foreground indeterminate ruinous bodies and a mobile urban populace that slips between the crevices of the urban landscape.

Chapter Three examines both artists' work in light of the gendered framework of (re)productive citizenship that was promoted by post-revolutionary politicians and intellectuals to propel national development. The first section of the chapter examines how Rivera's murals and Rulfo's short stories present alternative perspectives on the possibilities and outcomes of industrial development by conceptualising the technologised male body in terms of corporeal enhancement or cognitive and sensory dysfunction. The latter part of the chapter centres on the reproductive models of female citizenship that were promoted by the state to ensure the order and future prosperity of the nation. I consider how the negotiation of these restrictive concepts of womanhood during the period spanning from the 1920s to the mid-1950s is reflected in the transition from fixed to fluid female corporeal landscapes in Rivera's and Rulfo's works.

Turning to the representation of collective bodies, Chapter Four investigates how the peasant mass was conceptualised in post-revolutionary intellectual and political discourses of rural reform and national unity. Setting my readings against the backdrop of the sacralisation of revolutionary politics that occurred after 1920, this chapter examines how Rivera and Rulfo mobilise religious motifs and concepts to frame the relationship between the state and the rural peasantry in the context of the state's socialist educational programme and agrarian reform project respectively.

No study to date has explored the specific role of the body as a political signifier in Rivera's or Rulfo's works or its metaphorical centrality to post-revolutionary cultural debates on national identity. By providing the first analysis of their distinct corporeal imaginaries, the thesis offers a new vantage point from which to assess the aesthetic and political content of their oeuvres while also advancing our understanding of evolving post-revolutionary debates on national identity. Through its application of a multidisciplinary framework, the project will furnish a textured and multifaceted account of this complex

phase of cultural production that illuminates the intimate yet unexamined links between artistic and intellectual activity during this period of Mexican history. Looking beyond a simple comparison of these two figures, the study is expansive and multidimensional in its scope, tracing a complex history of imaginative constructions of nation and revolution, from euphoria to disenchantment.

Chapter One

Usable Pasts: Bodies of History in Post-Revolutionary Mexico

‘Para tener confianza en el porvenir se necesita tener un culto del pasado’.

“La patria reconocida”, *El Partido Liberal*, February 2, 1889¹

Mexico emerged from a chaotic revolutionary struggle to face an uncertain future. Already geographically, ethnically and culturally fragmented at the beginning of the twentieth century, its internal disunity was further exacerbated by the bitter factionalism of the armed conflict. To quote Alan Knight, in 1910 Mexico was:

Less a nation than a geographical expression, a mosaic of regions and communities, introverted and jealous, ethnically and physically fragmented, and lacking common national sentiments; these sentiments came after the Revolution and were (notwithstanding some theories to the contrary) its offspring rather than its parents.²

Confronted with the task of converting a debilitated and divided country into a stable unitary nation in the tumultuous decades that followed the conflict, the post-revolutionary state returned to the nation-building strategies of the Porfirian regime which, as the above epigraph demonstrates, sought to secure the nation’s future through the construction of foundational historical narratives. While the victors of the Russian and French revolutions declared their radical rupture with the past, post-revolutionary Mexican nation-builders established themselves as the custodians of a collective history rooted in the country’s pre-Colombian origins and recent revolutionary experience.

Contextualising my readings within the broader network of political and intellectual discourses that contributed to the construction of these imagined historical

¹ The newspaper *El Partido Liberal* was funded by the Porfirian administration.

² Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution Vol.2: Counter-Revolution and Reconstruction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 2.

communities, this first chapter explores how the ‘historical bodies’ presented in Rivera’s and Rulfo’s works uphold or unsettle the myths of ethnic and revolutionary unity and continuity that were propagated after 1920. My use of a multimedia archive encompassing muralism, painting, literature and photography enables me to consider the various representative dimensions of the body. By reading painted and photographic depictions of real political figures and indigenous subjects alongside metaphorical literary images of the body, I explore how both artists employ the human form both literally and figuratively, as a concrete ‘body in history’ and an allegorical ‘body of history’. Through a comparative reading of representations of the indigenous body in Rivera’s murals at the PN (1929) and the SEP (1923-1928) and Rulfo’s critically neglected mid-century photographs of the Mixe tribe in Oaxaca, the second part of the chapter will trace the intellectual and aesthetic transformations of post-revolutionary *indigenismo*, a state-sponsored political and cultural initiative that sought to forge collective memory around the notion of a shared indigenous past. Before moving on to this analysis, the first section explores how the literal and figurative historical bodies depicted in Rivera’s PN mural and Rulfo’s 1955 novel *PP* reflect evolving historiographical perspectives on the revolution from the 1920s to the 1950s by endorsing or problematising the notion of a unified and intelligible historical narrative.

Part I: Historiographical Hauntings: Collective Memories of the Revolution

Playing on the common etymological roots of the terms corpse/corpus, Michel de Certeau establishes a link between the body and historical writing in *The Writing of History* by metaphorising historiography as an act of entombment. Reflecting on the totalising historiographical models developed in nineteenth-century France, he presents the historian as a mortician who summons the dead only to silence them by placing them in monumental

‘scriptural tombs’ (*tombeaux scriptuaires*).³ De Certeau explains how historical writing memorialises these dead bodies ‘on the condition that they remain forever *silent*’ and separates ‘what can be understood and what must be forgotten in order to obtain the representation of a present intelligibility’.⁴ He attributes this emphasis on intelligibility, and the link it implies between knowledge and visibility, to the fact that modern historiography developed alongside the scientific study of anatomy. Just as modern medicine fixes the body as a ‘legible picture’ to be mastered through observation, historiography presents the past as a *corpus* of knowledge, ‘a silent corpse’, to be deciphered.⁵ However, de Certeau also hints at the possibility of an alternative embodied past, an opaque ‘other’ that eludes the historian: ‘a murmur [...] that seduces and menaces our knowledge’.⁶ Introducing an ethical dimension to this spectral past, de Certeau describes how those previously suppressed voices return to fill the gaps in official history: ‘These voices whose disappearance every historian posits, which he replaces with his writing – “re-bite” (*re-mordent*) the space from which they were excluded’.⁷

De Certeau’s metaphorical account of the suppressed voices of the past rising up from their tombs to haunt the present resonates with Rulfo’s portrayal of collective memory of the revolution as a chattering cemetery in the fictional post-revolutionary village of Comala. Written during an early revisionist phase in mid-century historiography of the revolution, the polyvocal chaos of *PP*, in which conflicting and inconclusive recollections compete for dominance, troubles the master historical narratives that were

³ Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 2.

⁴ De Certeau, *The Writing of History* 2, 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷ Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 8.

discursively and artistically constructed in the immediate aftermath of the conflict.⁸ During the intense nation-building period of the early 1930s, this vision of a singular and coherent revolutionary past achieved its most powerful aesthetic expression in Diego Rivera's triptych *Epopeya del pueblo mexicano* (1929-1935) at the PN, a panoramic national portrait that configures Mexico's deceased and living revolutionary leaders as a single corporeal monument.

The polyphonic disquiet of Rulfo's novel and the muralist's symbolic disinterment of the revolutionary dead reflects Blanco and Peeren's assertion, echoing de Certeau, that historiography functions as 'a form of haunting – of the past haunting the present as much as the present haunting the past'.⁹ Offering the first detailed analysis of their works against the backdrop of evolving post-revolutionary historiographical debates from the early 1930s to the mid-1950s, this first section of the chapter traces the imagined construction and dissolution of the state's univocal revolutionary narrative, from Rivera's projection of the revolution as a unitary pantheon of heroes in the PN to Rulfo's conceptualisation of collective memory as a cacophonous graveyard in *PP*. De Certeau's critique of nineteenth-century historiographical practices from a revisionist poststructuralist perspective in the latter half of the twentieth century is useful for mapping the transitions of the post-revolutionary historiographical landscape, which saw the totalising and distinctly Porfirian representational strategies of the 1920s and 1930s give way to mid-century philosophical debates regarding the limitations of historical knowledge. As de Certeau structures his argument around the idea of the *tombeau*, a term referring both to the symbolic burial site

⁸ As I note later in this chapter, while the revolution itself is rarely directly mentioned in *PP*, the estimated chronological scope of the novel, which covers the period spanning from the late nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, coincides precisely with the critical transitional phase leading from the Díaz regime to the institutionalised revolution. Boldy, *A Companion to Juan Rulfo*, 113.

⁹ María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, "Haunted Historiographies/ Introduction", in *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, eds. María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 482.

constructed through historical writing and a commemorative work of art, his discussion is particularly appropriate for examining the intersections between historiography and artistic production. Employing this concept, I read the central panel of Rivera's triptych and Rulfo's novel as two distinct visual and textual *tombeaux* or historiographies of the revolution that narrate the past through the body in different ways. I argue that changing perspectives on the limitations of historical knowledge from the 1920s to the 1950s can be perceived on the level of bodily legibility in the works of both artists. While Rivera's strategy of visually narrating the revolution through a cast of emblematic historical bodies upholds the distinctly nineteenth-century notion of the past as an intelligible corpus of knowledge or a 'legible picture', to recall de Certeau, Rulfo's elusive spectres embody the zeitgeist of mid-century historiography by articulating contemporary anxieties regarding the limitations of historical knowledge.

Official History and the Revolutionary Pantheon

De Certeau's interpretation of history as a discourse about dead bodies that can no longer speak for themselves is useful for setting the aims of official historiography of the revolution during the early post-conflict decades, which symbolically resurrected and memorialised its deceased leaders in an effort to suppress their competing voices and present the revolution as an indivisible movement. Mirroring the fractured composition of the nation at the time of its outbreak, Knight states that the revolution itself was 'many revolutions' formed of 'a bewildering collage of atomistic events and peculiarities'.¹⁰ A key aspect of the so-called 'psychological phase' of the revolution that began during the administration of Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-1928) was an attempt to quell revolutionary factionalism by inculcating a singular account of these events in the national

¹⁰ Alan Knight, "Interpreting the Mexican Revolution", in *Texas Papers on Mexico* (Austin: Institute of Latin American Studies, 1988), 8.

consciousness.¹¹ In manipulating collective memory to secure political legitimacy, the post-revolutionary state paradoxically followed the example of Porfirian liberals, who held that ‘a comprehensive nationalist history was the *sine qua non* both for the consolidation of the nation and as a proof of stability and civilization’.¹² Even more striking was the manner in which official post-revolutionary historiography recycled the totalising representational models of the previous regime, forging its revolutionary narrative around an imaginary pantheon of heroes that embodied the unity and continuity of Mexico’s recent political past.

By the 1920s, Carranza, Zapata and Madero were dead, providing the state with a cast of revolutionary figures whose memory could be moulded according to current political needs. As Benjamin notes, in the immediate post-conflict period, the politically and regionally fragmented nature of the revolution gave rise to a ‘babel of commemorative ceremonies, statues and tombs’ devoted to individual martyrs.¹³ Efforts to integrate these multivocal expressions of revolutionary memory into a single state-organised programme of commemoration began following the inauguration of president Plutarco Elías Calles and the establishment of an Official Committee of Patriotic Commemorations in 1925. While Madero, Zapata, Ricardo Flores Magón, Felipe Carrillo Puerto and Obregón had previously only been celebrated by their respective cults, public ceremonies and propaganda united these figures and contemporary politicians within the national imagination. Historical writing was also incorporated into this project of revolutionary conciliation during the interim presidency of Emilio Portes Gil (1928-1930), who

¹¹ This phrase was used by Plutarco Elías Calles in his “Grito de Guadalajara” of 1934. Quoted in José María Murià, *Historia de Jalisco* (Jalisco: Gobierno de Jalisco, Secretaría General, Unidad Editorial, 1982), 535.

¹² Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World’s Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 68.

¹³ Thomas Benjamin, “Mexico’s Monument to the Revolution”, in *Latin American Popular Culture: An Introduction*, ed. William H. Beezley (Wilmington: SR Books, 2000), 172.

commissioned a definitive account of the revolution that would offer ‘una interpretación colectiva e impersonal de los héroes’.¹⁴

This commemorative and discursive construction of a unified and historically continuous revolutionary ‘pantheon of heroes’ drew direct inspiration from official historiography during the Porfiriato, when dead political bodies enjoyed potent political afterlives. According to Florescano, during the regime:

se creó el panteón de héroes venerado en el calendario cívico: Cuauhtémoc, Hidalgo, Morelos, Melchor Ocampo, Benito Juárez, Ignacio Zaragoza, Porfirio Díaz [...] La presencia de estos patriotas en diferentes etapas de la formación del país expresaba la unidad y continuidad de la nación a pesar de las vicisitudes de la historia.¹⁵

Under Díaz, this illustrious collective was most frequently resurrected through images, which enjoyed a privileged position in Porfirian nation-building processes due to their capacity to effectively ‘represent complex historical narratives, and to convey abstract notions’.¹⁶ During the late nineteenth century, this link between visibility and historical knowledge was fostered by a positivist faith in scientific observation, derived from Comte’s elevation of historical research to the same category as the physical sciences, and a strong reliance on philosophical and cultural models originating in France, where visual forms of historical representation had flourished after the revolution.¹⁷ This visual impulse manifested itself in densely illustrated historical encyclopedias mapping Mexico’s historical and cultural evolution such as Vicente Riva Palacio’s *México a través de los siglos* (1884) and Antonio García Cubas’s *Atlas pintoresco e histórico de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos* (1885). The *Atlas pintoresco* (fig.1.1) and commemorative memorabilia marking the 1910 centenary of Mexican Independence (fig.1.2) follow the

¹⁴ Emilio Portes Gil, *En memoria de Zapata. Un balance social político del momento actual en México* (Mexico City: PNR, Biblioteca de Cultura Social y Política, 1936), 264.

¹⁵ Enrique Florescano, *Historia de las historias de la nación mexicana* (Mexico City: Taurus, 2002), 379.

¹⁶ Martínez Rodríguez, “Representing the Nation: Art and Identity in Porfirian Mexico”, 334.

¹⁷ Maurice Samuels, *The Spectacular Past: Popular History and the Novel in Nineteenth-century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 57.

contemporary pictorial convention of depicting the liberal pantheon, comprised of Díaz, Hidalgo and Juárez, among others, as a gallery of individual bust portraits.

Nineteenth-Century Visions of History in The Palacio Nacional

After 1920, these graphic forms of historical narrativisation assumed new form in the epic works of the muralists, which functioned as new visual monuments to the nation's shared revolutionary experience. While all three artists engaged with historical themes, Rivera's encyclopedic vocabulary of historical images established him in the eyes of many intellectuals as 'el mejor historiador que ha tenido México'.¹⁸ Rivera's historical vision extended beyond the artistic domain, inspiring historians like Alfonso Teja Zabre to create what were described as 'Dieguesque' histories of Mexico.¹⁹ Teja Zabre openly acknowledged Rivera's influence and included reproductions of his images in his *Breve historia de México* (1935), the first textbook with a strong revolutionary focus to be circulated in primary schools.²⁰

Although Rivera established himself as the definitive visual historian of the early post-revolution period, and was vocal in his rejection of Porfirian culture, his visual strategies of historical representation were deeply indebted to nineteenth-century Mexican and French models. This is most clearly demonstrated in his state-sponsored mural *La epopeya del pueblo mexicano* (fig.1.4) at the PN which progresses from North to South across the central staircase in three panels: *El antiguo mundo indígena*, *México de la Conquista a 1930* and *México de hoy y mañana*. The countless historical actors crowding this vast pictorial field form a dense human tapestry that Rivera himself likened to an

¹⁸ Fernando Benítez, "Diego Rivera y su visión de la historia de México", in *Diego Rivera y los escritores mexicanos: Antología tributaria*, 25.

¹⁹ Wolfe, *The Fabulous Life of Diego Rivera*, 263.

²⁰ A significant number of contemporary history textbooks produced in Mexico still bear Rivera's images (fig.1.3).

‘organismo vivo’.²¹ Echoing the ambitious claims of Porfirian visual historians such as Riva Palacio, who subtitled his historical encyclopedia ‘Historia general y completa del desenvolvimiento social, político, religioso, militar, científico y artístico y literario de México desde la antigüedad más remota hasta la época actual’, Rivera hailed the triptych as ‘el único intento, en toda la historia del arte, para representar en un solo lienzo continuo de pared la historia de todo un pueblo desde su pasado hasta su futuro predecible’.²² In line with the didactic aims of contemporary official history which sought to ‘mostrar al alumno la sociedad tal cual es y como ha sido y como pretende que sea’, the muralist replicated his predecessor’s positivist teleological conception of history by situating the revolution within a broader narrative of social evolution.²³

While the chronological sweep of Rivera’s mural is reminiscent of Riva Palacio’s illustrated historical survey, its scale and public presentation are modelled on the totalising historical art form *par excellence* of the nineteenth century: the panorama. Popularised in revolutionary and post-revolutionary France, these vast circular canvases produced a sense of visual mastery by enabling viewers to absorb complex historical scenes at a single glance. As a public spectacle, the panorama served as both a form of popular entertainment and a propagandistic tool by presenting audiences with a historical narrative that was highly accessible and often presented in a suggestive manner. Adapting this format to his post-revolutionary context, Rivera’s composition offers an all-encompassing view of the nation’s past, from its indigenous origins through the Independence and revolutionary movements and towards its utopian imagined future. Again taking its cue from the format of the panorama, Rivera’s vast historical fresco sought to promote a sense of historical

²¹ Diego Rivera, unpublished interview by Rafael Heliodoro Valle, May 23, 1938, transcript, Archivo Frida Kahlo y Diego Rivera, Museo Frida Kahlo, Mexico City.

²² Quoted in Raquel Tibol, “Palacio Nacional en el torrente muralista riveriano”, in *Los murales del Palacio Nacional*, ed. Raquel Tibol (Mexico City: INBA, 1997), 35.

²³ Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, *Nacionalismo y educación en México* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1970), 167.

unity, not only through its visual projection of a shared past, but also by fostering ‘imaginary bonds’ between viewers as they engaged in this public act of collective remembering.²⁴ The vast crowd heaving within the confines of the triptych thus directly reflects the kind of mass public reception it aimed to elicit. In order to reproduce the sense of visual and spatial mastery generated by the panorama, the architectural layout of the interior stairway invites observers to ascend the steps to reach the elevated and distanced vantage point of the upper balcony where a full view of all three panels can be achieved. From this position, the viewer can best access Rivera’s imagery of the revolution, identified as a defining moment in the nation’s evolutionary process by its location on the most elevated part of the central wall.

Painted between 1929 and 1931, this central panel entitled *México de la Conquista a 1930* narrates two of the nation’s most formative historical experiences, as scenes of the conquest surge up from its base to merge with episodes of revolutionary history in the upper arch (fig.1.5). Adopting the representational model of the Porfirian liberal pantheon, Rivera uses a cast of recognisable historical personalities to visually summarise the complex ideological conception and development of the revolution. The figures comprising this tightly knit group belong to various phases of Mexico’s recent political history, from the Independence movement of 1810–1821 through to the Constitution of 1857 and the Revolution of 1910–1920. At the centre of this crowd, Miguel Hidalgo (1753-1811), the father of Mexican Independence, stands alongside fellow revolutionary priest José María Tecla Morelos y Pavón (1765-1815). To their left, Vicente Guerrero (1782-1831) and Agustín de Iturbide (1783-1824), the architect of the Plan de Iguala (1821), are located below the post-revolutionary presidents Plutarco Elías Calles (1877-1945) and Álvaro Obregón (1880-1928). In the uppermost part of the arch, Emiliano

²⁴ Samuels, *The Spectacular Past*, 57.

Zapata (1879-1919), complete with signature moustache, is positioned alongside two other agrarian martyrs: the Yucatán governor Felipe Carrillo Puerto (1874-1924) and the peasant leader José Guadalupe Rodríguez (1870-1915).

The most innovative compositional feature of this section of the mural is the artist's manipulation of architectural space for the purposes of visual metaphor. Literalising de Certeau's notion of historiography as an act of entombment, Rivera suppresses the factionalised origins of the revolution by configuring these political heroes in the form of a unitary corporeal monument. The narrow vertical dimensions of this upper section and the curvature of the lunette create the impression of a dome-topped structure. The mass of political personalities inhabiting this imaginary cupola is buttressed by the pillar-like figures of anonymous campesinos positioned below, who embody the peasant foundations of the agrarian movement. Rivera's composition of this revolutionary unit prefigures the structure of the real 'Monumento a la Revolución', designed by Carlos Obregón Santacilia, and constructed in Mexico City between 1933 and 1938 (fig.1.6). As Rivera and Obregón Santacilia collaborated on the architectural and decorative schemes for the Secretaría de Salubridad e Higiene (1929) and the Hotel del Prado (1933-1946) it is possible that the concept and composition of the muralist's image served as a source of inspiration for the architect's commemorative project. For the structural basis of the monument, which is composed as a hemispheric dome supported by four arches adorned with sculptures of peasants and workers, Obregón Santacilia employed the iron skeleton of the unfinished Palacio Legislativo, an administrative building designed for the Díaz government. Although Obregón Santacilia's proposal to integrate a revolutionary 'Panteón de los Hombres Ilustres' was never formally approved, the idea gradually materialised as the mortal remains of Carranza, Madero (1960), Villa (1965), Calles (1969) and Cárdenas

(1970) were deposited in the different piers of the monument.²⁵ Just as Rivera cast his revolutionary narrative within a distinctly nineteenth-century representational scheme, Obregón Santacilia's use of the Palacio Legislativo as the structural foundation for his monument reveals how state-sponsored memorialisation of the revolution paradoxically continued to rely on Porfirian frameworks, both conceptual and literal, into the 1930s.

In line with de Certeau's notion of the past as a legible body or a 'cipher that awaits deciphering', Rivera maintains the Porfirian link between visibility and historical knowledge in the revolutionary segment of the central panel by engaging the viewer in an optical exercise of 'reading' these emblematic bodies to configure a particular narrative of the nation's political past.²⁶ This segment of the triptych is presented as a veritable portrait gallery and Rivera later explained that he had selected the most legible historical figures to ensure the panel achieved its desired social effect. He depicted the personalities he considered 'más representativos y mejor conocidos porque [...] la ideología del tema tenía que ser suficientemente sencilla y escoger hechos suficientemente claros y conocidos por los mexicanos para llenar la función social que quiere que tenga la pintura'.²⁷ Rivera's didactic use of the body for the purposes of historical narrativisation can be productively compared with Henri Gervex's and Alfred Stevens's historical panorama *L'Histoire de siècle* (1889) (fig.1.7), which includes 641 individual full-length portraits of notable political, intellectual and artistic figures from the previous century of French history. In her analysis of the scene Beatriz González-Stephan explains how:

²⁵ Thomas Benjamin, "Mexico's Monument to the Revolution", 173.

²⁶ De Certeau, *The Writing of History*, 3.

²⁷ Quoted in Alicia Azuela, *Arte y poder: Renacimiento artístico y revolución social: México, 1910-1945* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005), 168.

Thanks to the careful reproduction of portraits, the public was challenged to identify each individual represented. Here the exhibitionary complex was put to the test, as was dexterity of sight, for knowing how to read the images was also knowing how to recognise identities. It was also an exercise in selective memory that fixed some canonical faces while erasing others.²⁸

The revolutionary section of Rivera's triptych demands a similar visual acuity, engaging the viewer in an optical exercise of identifying and memorising particular bodies and their position within the pantheon while subtly effacing others. A logical sense of interconnectivity governs each of these political figures which, as Rivera himself highlighted, is 'dialécticamente conectado con sus vecinos, de acuerdo con su papel en la historia'. 'Nada era solitario' he stressed, 'todo era relevante'.²⁹ The panel thus functions as a visual history lesson that encourages the observer to identify and decode certain clues and details to identify the historical function of each figure and his political relationship to the other neighbouring bodies.

Positioned at the very centre of the group, Hidalgo clasps a broken chain in his right hand, a clear symbol of liberation, while his left hand holds forth the flag depicting the Virgin of Guadalupe that he famously brandished upon proclaiming independence. Elsewhere, banners play an equally important role in clarifying the ideological positions of certain figures. Iturbide triumphantly holds aloft the green *bandera trigarante*, symbolising the promise of independence, while in the opposite corner, the insurgent flag, *El Doliente de Hidalgo*, identifies its bearer as the Spanish insurgent general Francisco Javier Mina (1789-1817). The role of these props in enhancing the legibility of specific bodies is even more literal in the case of Zapata, Carrillo Puerto and Guadalupe Rodríguez,

²⁸ Beatriz González-Stephan, "Forms of Historic Imagination: Visual Culture, Historiography, and the Tropes of War in Nineteenth-Century Venezuela", in *Building Nineteenth-Century Latin America: Re-rooted Cultures, Identities, and Nations*, eds. Juan Carlos González Espitia and William G. Acree (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009), 128.

²⁹ Diego Rivera, *Mi arte, mi vida. Una autobiografía hecha con la colaboración de Gladys March* (Mexico City: Herrero, 1963), 131.

who are enveloped in the banner emblazoned with the agrarian slogan *Tierra y libertad*. Political affiliations are further suggested by smaller visual details such as the modern suits and presidential sashes worn by Calles and Obregón, setting them apart as representatives of the contemporary institutionalised revolution. By positioning these contemporary politicians alongside the ideological architects of the revolution and the anonymous campesinos located in the lower section of the arch, Rivera stresses the historical continuity of the revolution through its official conversion into government ('La Revolución hecha gobierno'). A notable absence from this central section narrativising the official institutionalisation of the revolution is Francisco 'Pancho' Villa, who can be found in a neighbouring lunette on the central wall alongside several other figures associated with the Porfiriato and the early stages of the revolution. As Villa's revolutionary credentials were not fully recognised by the state until the 1960s, Rivera's strategic grouping of historical bodies can be seen to engage viewers in the process of selective remembering and forgetting described by de Certeau.

While the various symbols and textual elements inserted in this section of the mural highlight the specific political roles of individual figures, the most striking aspect of its composition is its elision of difference. The inclusion of recently assassinated revolutionaries such as Obregón and Rodríguez hints at the revolution's fractured origins; however Rivera's collective configuration of these bodies eschews all traces of internal disharmony. Surveyed from the opposite-facing balcony, *México de la Conquista a 1930* corporeally narrates the nation's trajectory from political upheaval to harmonious unity. While the colonial confrontation is marked by a sea of erratic human movements in the lower section, this bodily chaos dissipates as we move up to the independence and revolutionary phases, where the spatial restrictions of the lunette compacts the figures into a neat mass. In contrast to the lower section of the mural, where we are granted a full-

length view of the bodies in a range of dynamic poses, the restricted composition of the upper section fixes the figures in rigidly frontal postures and renders them visible only from the shoulders up, creating a strikingly similar effect to the bust style portraits used to depict the heroes of the Porfirian liberal pantheon. This dense overlapping of figures creates an effect of visual ellipsis that enables them to achieve form only as a unit, illustrating the indissolubility of the revolution across political generations and social classes.

Alternative Voices: Revisionist Historiography and the Question of Historical Truth

The model of historical representation enshrined in Rivera's epic panorama and its unitary pantheon of revolutionary heroes underwent a series of transformations over the subsequent decades with the gathering social disenchantment of the Alemán era (1946-1952). With the decline of the state's revolutionary ideals during the 1940s, the monolithic accounts that had been constructed during the early post-revolution were gradually eroded by historiographical reassessments of Mexico's recent political past and philosophical debates surrounding the question of historical truth. From the mid-1950s into the 1960s, historiography drifted away from the heroic protagonists and master narratives of the previous decades to explore more marginalised perspectives on the revolution at a regional level. As Florescano writes:

Mientras la antigua historia se centraba en las hazañas de los grandes hombres y en los acontecimientos espectaculares, la nueva se interesa por los sectores populares, por los rincones olvidados de la vida cotidiana y ha incursionado con provecho en la historia de los marginados y de los "pueblos sin historia".³⁰

Early evidence of this shift can be found in the work of the Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de las Revoluciones de México (INEHRM), which was founded in 1953 with

³⁰ Florescano, *Historia de las historias de la nación mexicana*, 438.

the aim of gathering testimonies from those who had experienced Mexico's 'revolutions' in different states. One of the INEHRM's most noteworthy activities was the creation of the Archivo Sonoro in 1954, a pioneering initiative in the domain of oral history, which was followed by the founding of the official Archivo Sonoro de la Revolución Mexicana by historian Wigberto Moreno in 1959.³¹ Along with these methodological innovations, the professionalisation of history enabled the discipline to achieve greater autonomy during the 1940s and 1950s, resulting in significant improvements in both the quality and quantity of research. During this period, historians began to reassess the Porfiriato and the subsequent revolution, adopting a more sceptical view of the tangible achievements of the latter. Although this revisionist phase of revolutionary historiography would not flourish until the 1960s, Matute argues that from 1955 onwards scholarly examinations of the revolution began to expose 'su falta de unidad, sus paradojas internas y las crisis por las que atravesó en diferentes momentos'.³² He concludes that:

Ya no se trataba de recrear el esencialismo revolucionario, sino de investigar, sacar a la luz nuevos conocimientos en torno al proceso histórico de la Revolución, a partir de preguntas que ponían en crisis todo aquello que se tenía como esencial y, por lo tanto, inamovible. La Revolución se convirtió en un asunto que había que revisar.³³

Moving away from the totalising historical models of the 1920s and 1930s, Pérez Montfort asserts that historical research 'dio pasos en favor de la problematización de los fenómenos históricos, tratando de dejar atrás, sin lograrlo siempre, las definiciones de índole autoritaria y absoluta'.³⁴ In this regard, post-revolutionary developments were in keeping with the broader mid-century shift in historiographical attitudes outlined by Hayden White

³¹ Patricia Galeana, "Origen y actualidad del Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de las Revoluciones de México", in *60 años. Historia del Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de las Revoluciones de México*, ed. Patricia Galeana (Mexico City: INHERM, 2013), 19.

³² Álvaro Matute, "Orígenes del revisionismo historiográfico de la revolución mexicana", *Signos Históricos* 1, no. 3 (June 2000): 44.

³³ Matute, "Orígenes del revisionismo Historiográfico", 45.

³⁴ Ricardo Pérez Montfort, "Representación e historiografía en México 1930-1950: 'Lo mexicano' ante la propia mirada y la extranjera", *Historia Mexicana* 62, no. 4 (2013): 1655.

in *Metahistory*. White notes that while ‘historical knowledge’ was considered ‘an autonomous domain in the spectrum of human and physical sciences’ during the nineteenth century, by the mid-twentieth century, questions surrounding what it meant to ‘think historically’ were ‘undertaken in a somewhat less confident mood and in the face of an apprehension that definitive answers to them may not be possible’.³⁵

In Mexico, such historical scepticism was encouraged by contemporary philosophical discussions relating to the notions of perspectivism and historical relativism which had been introduced into mainstream debate by exiled Spanish intellectuals fleeing the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) such as José Gaos, a disciple of José Ortega y Gasset. The most influential aspect of Orteguian philosophy introduced by these *transterrados* was the notion of perspectivism, which proposed that reality was composed of ‘infinitas perspectivas, todas ellas igualmente verídicas y auténticas’.³⁶ Writing in 1952, Patrick Romanell argued that this concept, which defined history as ‘a matter of perspectives’ constituted ‘the greatest single intellectual force in the nationalization of the Mexican mind’.³⁷ During a 1945 roundtable entitled ‘Sobre el problema de la verdad histórica’, Alfonso Caso highlighted the philosophical roots of contemporary historiographical debates:

Es indudable que el problema de la verdad en materia histórica, no es un problema histórico, sino filosófico, es cuestión epistemológica, que queda comprendida dentro de la gran interrogación: ¿Qué es la verdad?³⁸

³⁵ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 1.

³⁶ José Ortega y Gasset, “La doctrina del punto de vista”, in *El tema de nuestro tiempo: El ocaso de las revoluciones: El sentido histórico de la teoría de Einstein* (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1966), 199.

³⁷ Patrick Romanell, *The Making of the Mexican Mind: A Study in Recent Mexican Thought* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952), 161, 184.

³⁸ Edmundo O’Gorman et al. “Sobre el problema de la verdad histórica (1945)”, in *La teoría de la historia en México 1940-1973*, ed. Álvaro Matute (Mexico City: SEP, 1974), 43.

This wave of historiographical reassessment manifested itself in literary production, as writers began eroding the state's monolithic accounts of the past and exploring the alternative micro-histories it had previously denied. Moving away from the sweeping historical narratives of the muralists, more marginalised and regionally focused perspectives on the revolution emerged in Nellie Campobello's testimonial-style novel *Cartucho* (1931) and Agustín Yáñez's psychological portrait of a pre-revolutionary rural community in *Al filo del agua* (1947). Written during the particularly intense phase of historiographical and philosophical debate in the mid-1950s, Rulfo's novel provides the clearest literary expression of contemporary intellectual shifts through its complex exploration of collective remembering in a post-revolutionary fictional context. By exposing the factionalised nature of memory in Comala and articulating distinctly mid-twentieth century anxieties regarding the limitations of historical knowledge, the text challenges some of the psychological aspects of the state's nation-building project.

As his literary career developed in the 1940s and 1950s, Rulfo maintained a longstanding personal interest in historical research. Víctor Jiménez recalls how 'Rulfo declaró de manera repetida que su verdadera vocación era la historia de México, antes aún que la literatura', adding that 'la aproximación de Juan Rulfo a ciertos periodos de la historia de México ... permite imaginar al historiador que pudo ser: uno muy crítico sin duda'.³⁹ It was this critical approach that later motivated Rulfo to revise a number of school textbooks circulating in the regions of Jalisco and Guadalajara that he claimed 'falsea(ban) la verdad':

Entre los textos que tomé como fuentes, fueron esos, los textos que enseñan en las escuelas primarias y que desde entonces empiezan a llenar la mente de estos jóvenes con datos falsos. Tomé en cuenta todo lo mal que se decía en esos textos, todo lo mal hecho, pero tampoco encontré la solución.⁴⁰

³⁹ Víctor Jiménez, introducción to *Nuevos indicios sobre Juan Rulfo: genealogía, estudios, testimonios*, ed. Jorge Zepeda (Mexico City: Fundación Juan Rulfo: Juan Pablos Editor, 2010), 1.

⁴⁰ Juan Rulfo, "Donde quedó nuestra historia", in *Toda la obra*, ed. Claude Fell (Paris: ALLCA XX, 1996), 421.

The writer hastily qualified his proposed revisions to these texts by noting: ‘Tampoco lo que yo juzgo verdadero, no lo tomen al pie de la letra; simplemente son divagaciones, más bien hipótesis’.⁴¹ Although Rulfo was dissatisfied with the inaccuracies of official history, he was also profoundly aware of the difficulty of achieving historical truth in any absolute sense. This historical scepticism pervades Rulfo’s literary universe where the past occupies a central yet precarious position. Recalling a series of misfortunes that has befallen his family due to a recent flood, the narrator of “Es que somos muy pobres” prefaces each of his recollections with the phrase ‘tal vez’, while attempts to reconstruct past events by the amnesiac narrators of “El hombre” and “Macario” are similarly obstructed by a series of inexplicable memory lapses. Rulfo explores this theme most comprehensively in *PP*, a text that examines the fragility of collective, rather than individual memory. In keeping with the gradual shift towards oral testimony and more regionalised perspectives amongst mid-century historians, Rulfo examines revolutionary experience through the microhistory of Comala, a decaying post-revolutionary village whose past is partially reconstructed through the voiced recollections of its deceased inhabitants. Composed of 69 chronologically disordered narrative segments, Rulfo’s brief novel formally dismantles the totalising model of official history enshrined in Rivera’s panoramic triptych and its assumptions of interpretative mastery.

Although its narrated events appear to unfold in a temporally unmoored rural dreamscape, the novel is anchored in a concrete historical moment. Based on the few temporal markers scattered throughout the text, Boldy estimates that it spans from the Porfiriato in the 1880s through to the 1910 Revolution and the Cristero Rebellion of 1926,

⁴¹ Rulfo, “Donde quedó nuestra historia”, 421.

up until the 1940s.⁴² Yet despite being set during this critical political period, Rulfo's novel intentionally demonumentalises the revolution by offering only fleeting glimpses of it, such as the brief dialogue between the *cacique* and a group of rebels, which satirically exposes its ideological incoherence. In what follows, I demonstrate how the novel's most powerful critique of both the revolution and post-revolutionary culture is indirectly articulated through its treatment of collective memory, which overturns the official historical narratives promoted by the nation-building state.

The Body as Crisis of Historical Representation in *Pedro Páramo*

The first section of the novel is narrated by Juan Preciado, who travels to the desolate post-revolutionary village of Comala at the request of his dying mother to locate his estranged father Pedro Páramo. As he proceeds through the village, Preciado is assailed by a swarm of unidentified voices emanating from historical moments spanning from the 1880s to the 1930s. It is only about midway through the novel that we learn that Preciado, and indeed all of Comala's inhabitants, are in fact dead and that their voices are emanating from different tombs in the village graveyard. Initially framed as a search for personal origins, the novel soon evolves into an investigation into the collective identity of Comala as Preciado, and by extension the reader, assumes the role of historian who must weave together these disparate oral testimonies to reconstruct the village's past. Preciado's investigative task is nevertheless frustrated by the competing accounts of the villagers that repeatedly interrupt, contradict or misinterpret one another. This fundamental irreducibility of the past, powerfully communicated through the trope of spectrality, establishes a parallel between historical and corporeal opacity in the novel. On his arrival to the town, Preciado catches sight of a woman wearing a shawl who swiftly disappears

⁴² Boldy, *A Companion to Juan Rulfo*, 113.

‘como si no existiera’ and soon afterwards encounters Doña Eduviges, his first female guide in Comala, whose bloodless face appears transparent before him: ‘Su cara se transparentaba como si no tuviera sangre, y sus manos estaban marchitas; marchitas y apretadas de arrugas. No se le veían los ojos’.⁴³ The translucent and withering figure of Eduviges alerts the reader at an early stage to the precarious status of the body in Comala, where, as Rulfo affirmed, ‘los hombres no tienen rostro, la gente no tiene cara, las figuras humanas no se definen’.⁴⁴ The correlation between the obscurity of the villagers and that of their past is established in the only explicit reference to ghostliness in the novel, when we learn that the nostalgic Páramo fears nightfall when he must ‘encerrarse con sus fantasmas’ (311). In the closing description of the *cacique*’s death, recollection is again directly linked to a process of obfuscation as his mind is flooded by memories that blur (*desdibujar*) the present (311).

Through these linkages, the figure of the spectre in Rulfo’s novel emerges as a figurative body of history, a corpus of knowledge about the past that eludes total intelligibility. De Certeau’s conceptualisation of historiography as a *heterology*, a discourse of the ‘other’, that at times resists the grasp of the historian and threatens our sense of knowledge, aligns with Colin Davis’s identification of spectrality as a metaphor for historiographical scepticism. Following Levinas’s description of scepticism as a ghostly shadow that haunts reason, Davis claims that it speaks for:

non-coincidence and fractured temporalities rather than a stable, unified plane of intelligibility in which everything can be reduced. It is like a ghost because it comes from a domain which reason cannot entirely capture or dominate. It is disturbing, disruptive, ungraspable.⁴⁵

⁴³ Juan Rulfo, *El Llano en llamas, Pedro Páramo, Castillo de Teayo* (Barcelona: RM Verlag, 2011), 198, 206. Subsequent page numbers in brackets refer to the same edition.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Vital Díaz, *Noticias sobre Juan Rulfo*, 205.

⁴⁵ Colin Davis, “The Skeptical Ghost: Alejandro Amenábar’s *The Others* and the Return of the Dead”, in *Popular Ghosts: The Haunted Spaces of Everyday Culture*, eds. María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren (London: Continuum, 2010), 66.

De Certeau's and Davis's identification of the ghostly with an interrogative and ethically-oriented mode of historiography that accepts the irrecuperability of certain aspects of the past illuminates Rulfo's use of spectrality as an expression of historical scepticism. Like the revolution itself, the bodies of Comala's villagers are figured as a fleeting presence in the novel's pages, obliquely glimpsed as distorted silhouettes or spectral forms that abruptly dissolve into shadows (205, 213, 91). In these images, Rulfo amplifies the inherent spectrality of the textual body which, as Hillman and Maude note, has no immediate means of conveying its concrete materiality on the written page.⁴⁶ Echoing Ellmann's description of writing as 'an art of discarnation', they assert that there are in fact 'no bodies in literature [...] there would seem on the face of it to be an apparent mutual exclusivity of the body and language - the one all brute facticity, the other supposing precisely the absence of matter'.⁴⁷ If, as Davis suggests, the phantasmatic body speaks to a deep historiographical crisis, Rulfo evokes this through a form of textual experimentation that plays on the limits of both literary and historical representation.

This correlation suggests that the writing of literature and history were interlinked for Rulfo. Pointing to the fundamental parallels between historical and fictional discourse, White highlights how the inherently discursive and interpretive nature of historical writing inevitably results in its assumption of literary conventions such as narrative structures and rhetorical devices.⁴⁸ As Linda Hutcheon has demonstrated in relation to postmodern literature, however, texts can also destabilise totalising master narratives and create alternative histories by rendering literary form fragmented and discontinuous.⁴⁹ The non-linear and fractured form of *PP*, with its multiple gaps and inconclusive narrative strands,

⁴⁶ Hillman and Maude, introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to The Body in Literature*, 4.

⁴⁷ Maud Ellmann, *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing, and Imprisonment* (London: Virago, 1993), 4; Hillman and Maude, introduction, 4.

⁴⁸ Hayden White, *Metahistory*, 1-43.

⁴⁹ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2001), 63.

suggests that Rulfo's literary engagement with the past was influenced by his anxieties as a historian. Although he felt compelled to revise misleading official historical accounts, he remained acutely aware of the impossibility of achieving an objective description of the past. 'Todo es hipotético, todo es un supuesto', he insisted, 'nada nos acerca a la verdadera realidad'.⁵⁰

By problematising the legibility of the past through the spectral body (from the Latin *specere*: to look at), Rulfo's novel challenges the epistemological assumptions of the aesthetic historiographical model that surfaces in Rivera's works, and the visual forms of knowledge in which it is founded. Karen Jacobs explains how the devalorisation of vision in the early twentieth century manifested itself in the works of Anglo-American modernist writers, who reacted against nineteenth-century realism and naturalism and their positivist faith in a 'universal and accessible visual language' by undermining the reliability of human sight.⁵¹ Preciado's inability to locate Eduvigés's eyes as he contemplates her transparent face ('No se le veían los ojos', 206) points to a similar crisis of vision in Rulfo's novel. Preciado claims that he has brought Dolores's eyes to see Comala, but it becomes apparent that he has inherited impaired vision as she soon loses sight of him ('No, hijo, no te veo', 245), leaving him to grope his way through the village unguided. Throughout the novel, human sight is repeatedly described as limited or partially obstructed, with characters often perceiving their surroundings through half-opened eyes (213, 279, 305) or glimpsing other figures 'de reajo' (248, 300). Like Dorotea, whose eyes are 'tan sin mirada' (253), Fausta admits that she is 'tan cegatona' (298). Susana similarly complains of blurred vision ('yo veo borrosa la cara de la gente', 265) and her grotesque description of her eyeballs melting away (301) can be positioned alongside other violent images of

⁵⁰ Rulfo, "Donde quedó nuestra historia", 421.

⁵¹ Karen Jacobs, *The Eye's Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 9.

ocular damage in the novel. Páramo's father Lucas dies with a mangled eye while another anonymous man, recalling an altercation with the *cacique*, claims 'se me torció un ojo desde entonces' (267). This sustained assault on visual perception is also registered on the level of reader reception. Overturning the principles of visual control and dexterity shaping Rivera's historiographical model, *PP* plunges the reader into an imagined environment so obscure that Patrick Dove compares the act of navigating the text to 'undergoing an experience of blindness'.⁵²

The devaluation of sight logically results in a heightened sensitivity to sound in the novel, where the human voice provides the only means of retrieving information about the past. Interspersed with exhausted laughter, sighs and screams, the voices of the townsfolk offer fragmentary personal recollections ranging from the mundane to the euphoric and the tragic. Indeed, Dolores's description of Comala as 'una alcancía donde hemos guardado nuestros recuerdos' (246), echoing Eduvigés's earlier comment that her house is being used to store the 'tiliches' of the since departed villagers (199), encourages us to conceptualise the sepulchral village as a kind of polyvocal archive of collective memories – a literary *archivo sonoro* of the nation's past. Through this chaotic intermingling of voices, *PP* stages, to recall de Certeau, the return of those marginalised perspectives previously denied by official history. The novel's rejection of narrative univocality is intimately linked to the historiographical developments of the 1950s, illustrating the dissolution of the official master narratives of the revolution and the emergence of a contested and complex vision of the past that challenges assumptions of historical consensus.

⁵² Patrick Dove, *The Catastrophe of Modernity: Tragedy and the Nation in Latin American Literature* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2004), 112.

In literary theoretical terms, the multi-voicedness of *PP* aligns with Bakhtin's concept of polyphonic narration whereby 'several consciousnesses meet as equals and engage in dialogue that is in principle unfinalizable'.⁵³ Building on the experimental narrative strategies of Campobello and Yáñez, Rulfo's novel utilises this polyphonic effect to problematise the process of historical narrativisation and the possibility of historical consensus. Unlike the monologic novel in which 'all confirmed ideas are merged in the unity of the author's seeing and representing consciousness', the polyphonic text privileges no single point of view but is instead comprised of 'a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices'.⁵⁴ The link between polyphony and what Bakhtin describes as "unfinalizability", that is, the impossibility of integrating individual points of view within a single field of vision, provides a literary counterpart to the Orteguian perspectivist assumption that reality is shattered into 'facetas innumerables'.⁵⁵

While it places a thematic emphasis on disembodiment, the distinct vocal texture of Rulfo's novel encourages particularly embodied forms of reading. The reader not only experiences the protagonist's sensation of blindness, as suggested by Dove, but also his aural hallucinations. The proliferation of verbs such as *murmurar*, *susurrar* and *suspirar* throughout the novel transforms Comala into a chaotic soundscape of indistinct vocalisations; the disembodied maternal voice of Dolores that launches Juan's journey is 'secreta, casi apagada, como si hablara consigo mismo' (194) and his mind is subsequently inundated by 'secret' muttering voices (247). The isolated tombs from which the townsfolk tirelessly rehearse their recollections recall Steven Connor's description of interiorised

⁵³ Gary Saul Morson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaic* (California: Stanford University Press, 1990), 239.

⁵⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 82; 8.

⁵⁵ José Ortega y Gasset, "Verdad y perspectiva", in *Obras completas de Jose Ortega y Gasset*, vol.2 (Madrid: Alianza, 1983), 19.

forms of speech such as murmurs and whispers as ‘closet speech or “speaking within”’.⁵⁶ Unlike Rivera’s unifying mausoleum, these solitary sepulchral dwellings, which are inhabited by only one individual (such as Susana, who delivers her monologues from her ‘cajón negro’, 263) or two villagers (as in the case of Preciado and Dorotea), function as self-contained echo chambers. Through its emphasis on interiority and particularly interiorised speech, Rulfo’s novel is intimately attuned to what Connor describes as the ‘inner sonority’ of silent reading, that is, the internal sound effects generated by the reader’s mental enunciation of the text.⁵⁷ This act of interior vocalisation is uniquely effective in the case of *PP* as it recreates the inner speech of the villagers, transforming the mind of the reader into ‘an auditorium or *arena of internal articulations*’.⁵⁸ This phenomenological aspect of the reading process brings into focus the unique demands made on the body by literature and muralism on the level of aesthetic reception and their significance in relation to collective memory. While the public dimensions of Rivera’s mural art both visually and spatially engage viewers in a process of collective remembering, the interiorised forms of reading encouraged by *PP* evoke the solipsistic discourse of Comala’s townsfolk, who fail to establish any collective framework for interpreting the past.

In both their thematic content and aesthetic form, Rivera’s epic visual narrative and Rulfo’s fictional microhistory constitute two very different *tombeaux* of revolutionary memory from the 1920s to the 1950s. By tracing the transformation of Rivera’s unified revolutionary pantheon into the chattering cemetery of Comala, the first section of this

⁵⁶ Steven Connor, *Beyond Words: Sobs, Hums, Stutters and Other Vocalizations* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 50.

⁵⁷ Steven Connor, *Beckett, Modernism and the Material Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 106

⁵⁸ Connor, *Beckett, Modernism and the Material Imagination*, 107.

chapter has shed light on the evolution of post-revolutionary commemorative and historiographical practices, as well as the close links that developed between political, intellectual and artistic activity during these decades. Read comparatively, these works reflect Blanco and Peeren's conception of historiography as both 'a haunted (and haunting) practice'.⁵⁹ By resurrecting and silencing the revolutionary dead in the PN, Rivera suppresses a factionalised past that returns to haunt the reader of *PP*. Rulfo's configuration of Comala's graveyard as a chaotic polyvocal archive dramatises the resurgence of these previously marginalised perspectives which, to recall de Certeau, 'continue to speak in the text/tomb that erudition erects in their place'.⁶⁰ As visual and literary historians, Rivera's and Rulfo's works illustrate a broader transition in post-revolutionary historiographical practices, from the nineteenth-century modes of historical narrativisation that persisted into the 1920s to a mid-twentieth century awareness of the limitations of such interpretative and representational frameworks. Following de Certeau's corporeal metaphors of the historiographical process, this shift can be perceived through both artists' figuration of literal and figurative bodies as receptacles for historical knowledge. Unsettling the epistemological assumptions underpinning Rivera's legible corporeal narrative of the revolution in the PN, the elusive spectres of Comala problematise the process of reading history as a visible *corpus* or 'body' of knowledge and open up an inconclusive and ungraspable collective past.

⁵⁹ Blanco and Peeren, "Haunted Historiographies/Introduction", 483.

⁶⁰ De Certeau, *Heterologies*, 8.

Part II: Encounters with the ‘Other’: Evolving Visual Discourses of indigenismo

While revolutionary memory was manipulated in the political arena to secure public faith in the state’s political agenda, illusions of historical unity were also crafted by intellectuals to satisfy the cultural exigencies of the period. This narrative of cultural unity and continuity was provided by indigenismo, a state-sponsored discourse that forged collective memory around the notion of a shared indigenous past and aesthetically celebrated the nation’s autochthonous roots as the basis for an authentic post-revolutionary cultural identity. These aspects of the indigenista project find expression in Alfonso Reyes’s literary essay “Visión de Anáhuac” (1917), which poetically recreates the first impressions of the Spanish chroniclers on reaching the Valley of Mexico in 1519. Through the eyes of the *conquistadores*, the narrator perceives indigenous figures amidst the lush vegetation whose smiling faces encourage him to advance: ‘van y vienen las túnicas de algodón rojas, doradas, recamadas, negras y blancas, con ruedas de plumas superpuestas o figuras pintadas. Las caras morenas tienen una impavidez sonriente, todas en el gesto de agrandar’.⁶¹ In the essay’s closing lines, Reyes identifies this emotional response to the landscape as evidence of a telluric bond between twentieth-century Mexicans and their indigenous ancestors:

Nos une con la raza de ayer, sin hablar de sangres [...] la comunidad, mucho más profunda, de la emoción cotidiana ante el mismo objeto natural [...] El choque de la sensibilidad con el mismo mundo labra, engendra un alma común.⁶²

Reyes’s description of a ‘common soul’ uniting modern Mexicans with their indigenous forebears exemplifies the ‘intimate’ tone of early twentieth-century indigenista discourse which, as Estelle Tarica has demonstrated, employed a ‘language of spirit and sentiment’ to foster a sense of ‘shared communication and experience rather than an external,

⁶¹ Alfonso Reyes, “Visión de Anáhuac”, in *Última Tule y otros ensayos* (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1991), 6.

⁶² Reyes, “Visión de Anáhuac”, 16.

objective position vis-à-vis Indians'.⁶³ While Reyes's emotive prose clearly looks to evoke this 'intimate affinity with Indians', his framing of "Visión" from the perspective of the Spanish invaders illuminates the neo-colonial structures underpinning the movement's discursive and aesthetic revalorisation of the indigenous. Post-revolutionary indigenismo was inextricably intertwined with Vasconcelos's concept of *mestizaje*, which visualised the formation of a 'cosmic' mestizo race composed of both European and indigenous racial elements as the foundation for a unified and distinct national identity. Indigenismo served the purposes of *mestizaje* by simultaneously advocating the cultural and racial assimilation of native communities into the mainstream mestizo body politic, while also asserting Mexico's cultural singularity by pursuing a rediscovery of its primitive origins in the indigenous body. In contrast to conventional colonial paradigms, in which the difference between coloniser and colonised is easily asserted due to geographical and cultural distance, post-revolutionary nation-builders were forced to reckon with the Indian as an 'other' residing within the boundaries of the national community. As an internal colonial discourse, indigenismo constructed a unique relationship between non-Indian and Indian that emphasised intimacy and emotion while also maintaining the inherent inferiority of the country's indigenous population.

The contradictory set of relations that formed the basis of post-revolutionary indigenismo were deconstructed by Luis Villoro in his landmark study *Los grandes momentos del indigenismo* (1950). Mapping changing constructions of indigeneity within the national consciousness from the sixteenth century to the contemporary moment, Villoro explains how the post-revolutionary period witnesses a shift in attitudes towards *lo indígena*. In contrast to the Porfiriato, when the indigenous was confined to a distant

⁶³ Estelle Tarica, *The Inner Life of Mestizo Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xxii-xxiii.

pre-Colombian past, he claims that after the revolution, there begins ‘un nuevo movimiento de acercamiento del indígena. Si ya presenta valor positivo, no habrá peligro alguno en aproximarlos; su misma positividad nos incita a ello’.⁶⁴ Adopting a metaphor of visualisation, Villoro argues that this interaction with the indígena facilitates a process of self-realisation for the mestizo: ‘Al mirar al indio, se reconoce el mestizo como impulso hacia la unidad’.⁶⁵ Despite its unifying impulse, Villoro underlines how the unidirectionality of this gaze relegates the indigenous other to a position that is ‘siempre revelada y nunca revelante’.⁶⁶ Villoro concludes, however, by pointing to the potentially constructive capacity of indigenismo to destabilise national identity and trigger a moment of self-reflection in which the mestizo ‘vuelve la mirada sobre sí mismo para conocerse y descubre en su interior la inestabilidad y la contradicción’.⁶⁷ Maintaining the metaphor of the gaze, Villoro suggests that this could lead to a more equal relationship between mestizo and *indio* based on mutual recognition: ‘Vendrá el momento en que no haya jerarquías en las razas ni dominio de una sobre la otra; en que todas las que ahora se diversifican se reconozcan recíprocamente’.⁶⁸

Exploring for the first time the intersections between intellectual and visual discourses of indigenismo, the second section of this chapter examines how Rivera’s and Rulfo’s plastic and photographic depictions of the indigenous body align with the two possible models of post-revolutionary indigenismo outlined by Villoro. By engaging in a historically and culturally contextualised reading of their works, produced between 1923 and 1957, I argue that they reflect a fundamental shift in intellectual and artistic interpretations of the relationship between the mestizo and the *indio*, by moving from an

⁶⁴ Luis Villoro, *Los grandes momentos del indigenismo* (Mexico City: Ediciones de la casa chata, 1979), 236.

⁶⁵ Villoro, *Los grandes momentos*, 183.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 229.

immersive and primarily emotion-based aesthetic model to one founded on critical distance and self-reflexivity. Beginning with Rivera's indigenous imagery at the PN and the SEP (1923-1928), I explore how these works capture the contradictory impulses of indigenismo by aesthetically reproducing the intimate but unequal encounter between mestizo and Indian described by Villoro. Analysing *El antiguo mundo indígena* (1929) at the PN in relation to the aesthetic philosophies of the Ateneo de la Juventud, I examine how this panel exemplifies indigenista efforts to overcome the mestizo's inherent externality to the indigenous other by using immersive strategies that draw the viewer into the imaginary space of the mural. As I demonstrate, however, despite these illusions of proximity, Rivera's murals replicate the unidirectional power relations of indigenismo by using orientalisng strategies to present the native body as a passive object of the mestizo gaze. In reading these works alongside Rulfo's mid-century photographs of the Mixe tribe in Oaxaca, I consider how the mechanics of pictorial and photographic representation produce different effects in relation to the gaze. In these photographs, Rulfo's physical presence is frequently registered by his real indigenous subjects, disrupting the viewer's immersion in the image. By engaging in a close reading of one of Rulfo's previously unexamined photographs of two Mixe dancers, I demonstrate how the destabilising function of the returned indigenous gaze signals a shift towards the more self-reflexive model of indigenismo proposed by Villoro.

Indigenismo: Incorporating the Indigenous into National Culture

The post-revolutionary indigenista movement was spearheaded by the anthropologist Manuel Gamio, who crusaded for 'la redención de la clase indígena' by stressing the validity of indigenous culture and vernacular aesthetics.⁶⁹ In *Forjando patria* (1916) and

⁶⁹ Manuel Gamio, *Forjando patria* (Mexico City: Librería de Hermanos Porrúa, 1916), 31.

La población del valle de Teotihuacán (1922), Gamio advocated the integration of the indigenous population into mainstream national culture as a means of establishing ‘un verdadero nacionalismo integral’.⁷⁰ Central to the indigenista project was the reconceptualisation of the nation’s autochthonous culture as the bedrock of contemporary mexicanidad. Gamio identified art as ‘una de las grandes bases del nacionalismo’ and attributed a crucial function to aesthetics in bringing the Indian to the forefront of the national consciousness.⁷¹ In the visual domain, this cultural revalorisation of the *indio* was carried out through positive pictorial representations of indigenous peoples by artists such as Dr. Atl, Roberto Montenegro, Fernando Leal and Fermín Revueltas, and regional dance performances choreographed by the artist-intellectual Adolfo Best-Maugard. As Guillermo Bonfil-Batalla notes, during this visually-saturated campaign, ‘México profundo mostró por un momento su presencia real y no fue posible cerrar los ojos ante él’.⁷² The powerful visual dimension to the indigenista project encapsulated the fundamental contradictions of a movement that sought to enhance the visibility of the indigenous body in the cultural sphere, while simultaneously advocating its gradual erasure through racial assimilation.

Like Gamio, who hoped that positive expressions of indigeneity would enable Mexicans to ‘forjarse - ya sea temporalmente - un alma indígena’, the muralists viewed art as a means of resurrecting an indigenous spirit that had been lying dormant within the national consciousness.⁷³ In their 1923 manifesto, they stressed the mestizo’s biological and spiritual bonds with the Indian:

⁷⁰ Manuel Gamio, *Antología*, ed. Juan Comas (Mexico City: UNAM, 1993), 129.

⁷¹ Gamio, *Forjando patria*, 67.

⁷² Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *México profundo. Una civilización negada* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1989), 167.

⁷³ Gamio, *Forjando patria*, 40.

No sólo todo lo que es trabajo noble, todo lo que es virtud, es don de nuestro pueblo (de nuestros indios muy particularmente), sino la manifestación más pequeña de la existencia física y espiritual de nuestra raza como fuerza étnica brota de él.⁷⁴

As self-elected spokespersons of the nation's downtrodden, the muralists reinvigorated the pre-Hispanic form of the mural and adopted the indigenous body as a core component of their pictorial vocabulary. The formal dimensions of muralism secured it a privileged position within the indigenista cultural campaign. Inspired by pre-Columbian artistic traditions, mural art provided a sense of cultural continuity with the nation's autochthonous past while also harnessing what both Gamio and Rivera identified as the profoundly emotion-centred quality of indigenous artistic expression.⁷⁵ Although Rivera amassed an extensive collection of ethnographic photographs, he notably never experimented with the medium to depict indigenous themes. Rivera's aesthetic preferences in this regard were consistent with those of contemporary Andean indigenistas who, as Poole explains, celebrated the 'sentimental realism' of painting over photography in its ability to capture 'el sentimiento andino'.⁷⁶ According to Poole, these artists 'could translate this sentiment into the painterly art of color, emotion, and personal – as opposed to mechanical– sensibility'.⁷⁷ In Mexico, this perceived superiority of painting was reflected in the pictorial style adopted by folkloricist photographers during the early decades of the twentieth century, who sought to conceal the indexical nature of their medium by using the camera 'as a nineteenth century paintbrush', to portray indigenous landscapes and bodies.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ David Alfaro Siqueiros, "Manifiesto del Sindicato de Obreros, Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores", in *Palabras de Siqueiros*, ed. Raquel Tibol (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996), 24.

⁷⁵ 'Sobre todo, había estado centrado en la emoción': Rivera, *Mi arte, mi vida*, 43.

⁷⁶ Deborah Poole, *Vision, Race, and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 194.

⁷⁷ Poole, *Vision, Race, and Modernity*, 194.

⁷⁸ John Mraz, *Looking for Mexico: Modern Visual Culture and National Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 77.

Engaging with the ‘other’: Aesthetic Immersion in *El antiguo mundo indígena* (1929)

In 1921 Rivera had returned from Paris to Mexico, where the heady cultural climate of the early nation-building period encouraged his engagement with pre-Columbian artistic forms. Eager to de-Europeanise his style and cultivate his interest in national themes, Vasconcelos invited Rivera to visit the Yucatán Peninsula in 1921 and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Oaxaca the following year. These experiences proved formative for the artist, who accumulated an extensive archive of sketches and mental images from which he would draw throughout his career. Although Rivera had already included indigenous figures in several of his early murals, the PN commission represented his most significant engagement with this theme to date. Saturated in warm colour and distinguished by its open spatial configuration, *El antiguo mundo indígena* (fig.1.8), which occupies the entire north wall, immediately attracts the viewer’s eye from the vantage point of the upper balcony. To the centre of the panel, a group of votaries kneel in silent devotion around the Mesoamerican deity Quetzalcoatl, adorned with an elaborate costume and headdress. The centre-left of the panel thematically revolves around indigenous artistic expression, depicting figures engaged in sculpting, weaving, dancing and ceramic and gold production. Beneath a line of overlapping labouring bodies positioned to the centre left of the image, a fierce battle between warring tribes unfolds in the bottom left-hand corner. Set apart from the more crowded central and south walls, the compositional simplicity of the north panel and its narration of events through clearly defined groupings of bodies forms an almost pictographic visual language reminiscent of the Mesoamerican codices.

While the panel can be viewed from a range of perspectives, the spatial cues of the main staircase invite us to engage with it from the closer vantage point of the steps ascending alongside the north wall. Viewed from this angle, the mural can be seen to stage an encounter between the implicitly mestizo viewer and indigenous subject that closely

aligns with the early post-revolutionary model of indigenismo described by Villoro. While the immersive aspects of the mural create an illusion of proximity between observer and subject, the function of the gaze attributes visual agency exclusively to the former. The class and racial assumptions on which this model of viewer engagement is predicated were consistent with the realities of mural reception in Mexico in the late 1920s. Despite their revolutionary claims to democratise art, the location of the muralists' works in public buildings in Mexico City rendered them inaccessible to those sections of the population they claimed to elevate, such as indigenous communities and peasants. As Mary Kay Coffey explains, prior to 1934, 'the frescos intended for a broad public were actually limited to a mostly cosmopolitan and urban audience' consisting of middle-class students and civil servants.⁷⁹ While photographic reproductions of the murals were distributed in some rural communities, the opportunity to both visually and spatially experience these works was reserved for a relatively small number of educated observers living in the predominantly mestizo capital.

In *El antiguo mundo* Rivera makes use of the architectural and visual elements of his medium to aesthetically stage the 'comuni3n' (H3ctor P3rez Mart3nez) or 'comunicaci3n' (Agust3n Y3ñez) with the ind3gena described by post-revolutionary intellectuals.⁸⁰ In its attempts to transport the viewer to an imaginary pre-Columbian Mexican reality, Rivera's panel constitutes a form of pictorial analogue to Reyes's poetic vision of An3huac. In his vivid reconstruction of the Valley of Mexico, described by Paz as a 'vasto fresco en prosa', Reyes's sensuous prose creates a sense of emotional proximity between the contemporary reader and the nation's pre-Columbian ancestors.⁸¹ In addition

⁷⁹ Mary K. Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture: Murals, Museums, and the Mexican State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 22.

⁸⁰ Villoro quotes these phrases as evidence of the language of solidarity and sentimentality that developed around indigenismo. Villoro, *Los grandes momentos del indigenismo*, 197.

⁸¹ Octavio Paz, *Las peras del olmo* (Mexico City: Imprenta Universitaria, 1957), 20.

to its rich visual texture, the melodic language of the local inhabitants, perceived as ‘una canturía gustosa’, adds an acoustic dimension to the text, producing an intoxicating ‘mareo de los sentidos’.⁸²

Reyes’s multi-sensorial evocation of the indigenous world was consistent with the aesthetic theories of the Ateneo, who railed against Porfirian positivism and embraced the theories of Henri Bergson to privilege sensory perception and emotional intuition as the most effective means of comprehending reality. Vasconcelos identified this form of intuition as the most appropriate for the ‘raza emotiva’ of Latin America and underlined the persuasive power of emotion-based art, claiming that ‘los hombres son más impresionables cuando se les aborda por el conducto de los sentidos como acontece cuando alguien contempla hermosas formas y figuras o escucha hermosos ritmos y melodías’.⁸³ Like Antonio Caso, Vasconcelos asserted that the immediate perception of beauty could produce a response of ‘emotional empathy’ through which the perceiver would become ‘fused’ with the work of art.⁸⁴ As Tirres notes, this empathetic merging of subject and object through the contemplation of a work of art provided Vasconcelos with an aesthetic counterpart to the process of cultural and racial fusion enacted through *mestizaje*.⁸⁵

As a member of the Ateneo Rivera subscribed to the group’s aesthetic theories and *El antiguo mundo* can be seen as an attempt to create an experience of aesthetic empathy by activating the immersive qualities of pre-Hispanic muralism. Discussing the evolution of all-embracing image-spaces from antiquity to the present day, Oliver Grau explains how artworks lacking the concrete boundary imposed by the frame aim ‘to appeal not only to

⁸² Reyes, “Visión de Anáhuac”, 6.

⁸³ José Vasconcelos, *Pitágoras: una teoría del ritmo* (La Habana: Imprenta, 1916), 13.

⁸⁴ Roberto S. Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús: Towards a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 97-98; Arthur Berndtson, “Mexican Philosophy: The Aesthetics of Antonio Caso”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 9, no. 4 (1951): 326-327.

⁸⁵ Christopher D. Tirres, *The Aesthetics and Ethics of Faith: A Dialogue Between Liberationist and Pragmatic Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 70.

the eyes but to all other senses so that the impression arises of being completely in an artificial world'.⁸⁶ In line with the aesthetic objectives of the Ateneo, this illusionistic form of visual representation produces a model of viewer engagement that is 'characterised by diminished critical distance to what is shown and increasing emotional involvement in what is happening'.⁸⁷ In *El antiguo mundo*, Rivera exploits these unique compositional features of muralism to produce an immersive aesthetic experience that appeals to the viewer on a primarily emotional level. As the spatial dimensions of the panel demand the engagement of the viewer's physical body, the impression of a co-extensive aesthetic space is created.

The 'hermosas formas y figuras' and 'hermosos ritmos y melodías' described by Vasconcelos achieve visual form in the mural where vivid imagery is combined with illusions of sound and movement to draw the viewer into its imagined space. As we ascend or descend the stairway to follow the visual narrative our movement infuses the entire scene with an almost cinematic vitality, creating a kinetic unity between the viewer and the animated indigenous figures inhabiting its painted interior. This is most pronounced in the upper right-hand section of the panel where the serene productivity of the artists gives way to the energetic gestures of a group of musicians and dancers, whose graceful bodies mimic the cornstalks swaying behind them. Following Reyes's literary strategies, Rivera heightens the sensorial impact of his imagery to destabilise the boundaries separating the interior space of the mural and external reality. Reproducing Reyes's interpretation of synesthesia as 'audición colorida' in pictorial terms, Rivera accentuates the harmonious movements of the dancers by creating the impression of sound emanating from their percussion instruments.⁸⁸ This acoustic effect is in turn reproduced by the shuffle and echo

⁸⁶ Oliver Grau, *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2003), 14.

⁸⁷ Grau, *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion*, 13.

⁸⁸ Alfonso Reyes, *Tres puntos de exegética literaria* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1945), 63.

of footsteps on the stone staircase, again producing a kind of rhythmic identification between viewer and subject.

A similar sense of proximity is produced elsewhere in the panel through the pronounced realism of the indigenous bodies and the inclusion of subtle optical illusions. The tense musculature of the bare-chested warriors in the foreground injects the battle scenes with a sense of physical immediacy, creating such a powerful illusion of three-dimensionality that their stretched limbs and raised spears appear to almost jut out of the wall. A similar optical effect can be discerned in the far right-hand side of the wall where a young woman, positioned almost directly at eye-level, sits weaving (fig.1.9). The rope connected to her loom appears to be attached to the concrete wall of the palace, dissolving the boundary between the mural and the external space inhabited by the viewer.

Rivera's Indigenista Optics

For Villoro, this sense of proximity to the Indian constitutes a defining aspect of post-revolutionary indigenismo. Through the metaphor of the gaze, however, he underlines how, despite these illusions of intimacy and unity, indigenismo deprives the indigenous other of knowledge and agency: 'el indígena es comprendido y 'juzgado ("revelado") por el no indígena (la "instancia revelante")'.⁸⁹ As Mario Teodoro Ramírez asserts, in this encounter, 'la reciprocidad de las miradas, del reconocimiento, está excluída'.⁹⁰ The visual metaphors used by Villoro to explain indigenismo's internal colonial project foreshadows Edward Said's discussion of orientalism as a power network and set of imaginative or aesthetic practices in his seminal *Orientalism* (1978). In line with Foucault's nexus of *savoir/pouvoir*, where the concepts of knowledge and power are etymologically linked by

⁸⁹ Villoro, *Los grandes momentos*, 11.

⁹⁰ Mario Teodoro Ramírez, "Estadios de la otredad en la reflexión filosófica de Luis Villoro", *Diánoia* 52, no. 58 (2007): 157.

vision (*voir*), Said illustrates how the West has discursively and visually constructed the Orient to validate Western dominance in colonial power relationships. While indigenismo differed fundamentally from the Anglo-French colonial paradigm through its focus on an internal other, Villoro's study prefigures many of Said's arguments by demonstrating how the imagined figure of the *indio* has served to consolidate notions of mestizo identity and authority.

Although Rivera's work has surprisingly never been examined through an orientalist lens, its conceptual framework and strategies of representation are useful for understanding how his mural visually reproduces the colonial narrative perspective of Reyes's essay. In keeping with the conventions of orientalist visual representation, the indigenista project of 'rediscovering' the Indian is registered on a corporeal level in Rivera's panel through its 'uncovering', or 'laying bare' of the indigenous body. In contrast to the more compacted scenes in the upper sections of the central and south walls, where the layering of figures renders individuals only partially visible, the relative spaciousness of the northern panel grants the observer a complete view of the bare and semi-clothed indígenas inhabiting its interior. Rivera notably positions the more exposed bodies in the lower foreground of the mural where they are more immediately discernible to the viewing eye. The muralist's foregrounding of these particular bodies establishes an unbalanced viewing power dynamic which is further enforced by his use of the 'back view' pose conventionally used by orientalist artists to depict the colonial subject.⁹¹ The more prominent male figures located in the lower section of the panel are turned away from the viewer (figs.1.10-12), exposing a sculpted physicality reminiscent of Saturnino Herrán's sensual depictions of the indigenous male body in works such as *El Quetzal* (1916) (fig.1.13). Herrán's rear-view portrayal of the subject in this portrait highlights the erotic

⁹¹ Linda Nochlin, *The Politics of Vision* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 47.

undertones to his aestheticisation of the Indian body by presenting it as a passive object of contemplation. Rivera's strategic positioning of male indigenous bodies produces a similar effect in *El antiguo mundo*. While the straining bodies of the warriors and the sculptor in the lower and middle sections are presented at eye level, their gazes are cast downwards or away, facilitating the viewer's total immersion in this impressive anatomical display.⁹² Margaret A. Majumdar's observations on the function of the unreciprocated gaze in orientalist visual art again illuminate the colonial power dynamics underpinning these images. Echoing Villoro's description of indigenismo as an encounter in which the Indian is 'juzgado' and 'revelado' by the mestizo, Majumdar explains how 'in the orientalist gaze, the possibility of judgement is always there, but it is a one-sided judgment, that of the voyeur'.⁹³

This voyeuristic intent is more explicit in Rivera's imagery of indigenous female bathers in the SEP, which adheres to the orientalist convention of depicting women in more intimate settings. Stepping into the enclosed space of the elevator vestibule on the ground floor of the Patio del Trabajo, the viewer enters an imaginary timeless scene of Tehuana women bathing in the *cenotes* of Yucatán (1924) (fig.1.17). After the revolution, the figure of the Tehuana was upheld as the embodiment of an authentic and uncorrupted national essence and became the focal point for indigenista iconography. Although distinguished by her distinctive regional dress, the much-discussed sexually liberated attitude of the Tehuana validated artistic portrayals of her exposed body. This aesthetic celebration of the Tehuana and initiatives such as the 'india bonita' pageant of 1920 were

⁹² Rivera may have taken inspiration for this posture, and for the scenes of tribal conflict, from photographs included in his personal ethnographic collection (figs.1.14-1.15). This eroticisation of the indigenous male body is also evident in the cover images Rivera designed for *Savia Moderna*, the magazine of the Ateneo de la Juventud (fig.1.16).

⁹³ Margaret A. Majumdar, "Orientalism and the Problematic of Vision: A Contemporary Perspective", in *Eastern Voyages, Western Visions: French Writing and Painting of the Orient*, ed. Margaret Topping (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 348.

part of a broader effort to validate indigenous beauty by directing the mestizo male gaze towards the native female body. Rivera's panel pursues this eroticisation of the indigenous female by taking inspiration from the painterly genre of the bathing scene, a pictorial theme originating in the Renaissance period that was rejuvenated by twentieth-century impressionist and post-impressionist artists such as Edgar Degas and Paul Gauguin. In the panel located on the left-hand side of the alcove in the SEP, a group of indigenous women bearing baskets and water jugs stand amidst the tropical foliage on the elevated part of the river bank. Below, at the water's edge, four naked and semi-clothed indigenous women lean into the rock pools to wash themselves and their white sheets, their ochre skin seamlessly merging with the surrounding landscape.

As in the PN, Rivera again positions the more exposed female bodies in the immediately visible lower section of the panel and presents them from a rear angle to suggest their obliviousness to the viewer's gaze. The panel thus recreates Rivera's personal impressions of the native women of Oaxaca who, according to Marnham, enthralled him with their 'combination of sensuality and innocence' and 'were scarcely aware of his presence'.⁹⁴ During the 1920s, the motif of the bathing Tehuana was repeatedly used to play out this scopophilic fantasy of a unidirectional gaze cast on the naïve and unsuspecting indigenous female. In early works by Rufino Tamayo, Fermín Revueltas, Miguel Corvarrubias, as well as several of Rivera's easel portraits (figs.1.18-1.23) the undressed Tehuana is consistently depicted with her face turned away or obscured to facilitate the viewer's voyeuristic contemplation of her exposed body. By exploiting the unique architectural dimensions of the dimly lit alcove, Rivera extends this voyeuristic

⁹⁴ Patrick Marnham, *Dreaming with His Eyes Open: A Life of Diego Rivera* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), 167.

experience to a spatial level by creating the impression that the viewer is physically inhabiting this private scene.

The aesthetic model of indigenismo presented in Rivera's murals would become the focus of revision in the subsequent decades as the internal contradictions of the movement became apparent. Despite its outward denunciation of Porfirian attitudes, post-revolutionary indigenista policies ironically recycled racist liberal and positivist concepts of indigeneity by rhetorically celebrating Mexico's indigenous peoples while simultaneously advocating their gradual eradication through racial assimilation. Although the *indio* was presented as a key figure in the post-revolutionary national narrative, native communities continued to occupy a socially marginalised position and experienced little material change in economic conditions. By the 1940s and early 1950s, Gamio's rhetoric of indigenous integration began to ring hollow as most indigenous communities still had not achieved access to educational resources or basic agricultural and industrial technology. Villoro's study marked a shift in intellectual attitudes towards indigenismo as the paternalistic and racist foundations of the movement became the focus of criticism both in Mexico and Latin America.⁹⁵ From 1950 onwards, the assimilationist model began to lose support amongst anthropologists who favoured an 'acculturation' model that stressed cultural and political reciprocity.⁹⁶

In the realm of visual culture, this shift was reflected in photographic practices that began to subtly problematise the representational dynamics of conventional indigenista aesthetics. Erica Segre writes that 'from the mid-1950s, photography in Mexico becomes increasingly self-reflexive, especially in its relation to Indian culture, in response to the institutionalisation and discursive ubiquity of national anthropology'.⁹⁷ She identifies the

⁹⁵ James D. Henderson, *A Reference Guide to Latin American History* (New York: Sharpe, 2000), 300.

⁹⁶ Michael S. Werner, *Mexico: An Encyclopedia of Contemporary Culture and History* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1997), 287.

⁹⁷ Segre, *Intersected Identities*, 173.

period from the 1920s to the 1950s as a formative phase for Mexican photographers who became ‘jointly exercised by the conceptual and the political problem of visual identity and intrigued by the production of visuality itself’.⁹⁸ Rejecting the sentimentalising tone that had defined indigenista visual culture during the initial post-revolution period, photographers such as Manuel Álvarez Bravo, Lola Álvarez Bravo, Enrique Gutman and Carlos Jurado began to experiment with more thought-provoking ways of seeing that probed social realities and conventions. The photographs of Álvarez Bravo were emblematic of this turn, interweaving symbolism, surrealism and visual ambiguity to create an anti-picturesque visual aesthetic that demanded a critical, rather than emotional response from viewers. As Mraz explains, these artists recodified the folkloric visual vocabularies developed by the state-sponsored artists of the previous decades and explored the inherent otherness of Mexico revealed by the camera.⁹⁹ Echoing Villoro’s assertion that indigenismo protects the mestizo from the judgment of the indigenous gaze, photojournalist Nacho López underlined the power imbalances implicated in the act of looking and considered how photography might invert these dynamics:

Poner el ojo en el visor fotográfico, encuadrar al sujeto y oprimir el botón es fácil si se piensa que lo folclórico es el motivo principal. Ellos están tras las rejas, nosotros fuera. Si invertimos la imagen, los cautivos somos nosotros.¹⁰⁰

Reversing the Gaze: Self-Reflexivity and Distance in Rulfo’s Photographs

It was during this dynamic period of photographic activity in Mexico during the 1930s that Rulfo began experimenting with his own Rolleiflex 6x6 camera. In February 1955 he travelled to the Tlahuitoltepec region of Oaxaca with the photojournalist Walter Reuter to work as a screenwriter on a documentary sponsored by the Comisión del Papalopan entitled *Danza de los Mixes*. The project was part of Rulfo’s role as a researcher for the

⁹⁸ Ibid., 158.

⁹⁹ Mraz, *Looking for Mexico*, 86.

¹⁰⁰ Nacho López, *Los pueblos de la bruma y el sol* (Mexico City: INI: FONAPAS, 1981), 89.

Commission, an organisation responsible for installing the Miguel Alemán Dam in Nuevo Soyaltepec in Oaxaca. During this two-year period, Rulfo produced a series of unpublished texts and approximately 350 photographs of the Oaxacan landscape and its native inhabitants. Anthropological research would ultimately provide Rulfo with an escape route from writing. He joined the publications department of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) in 1962 and remained there until his death in 1986. Despite his professional involvement with the INI, which was responsible for implementing the state's indigenous acculturation policies, Rulfo insisted on Mexico's insurmountable heterogeneity: 'Lo mexicano son muchos Méxicos. No hay una cosa determinada que pueda permitirnos decir: Así es México [...] Es uno de tantos Méxicos'.¹⁰¹ Rulfo underlined the devastating impact of the conquest on Anáhuac's inhabitants and claimed that *mestizaje* had replicated oppressive colonial systems, describing it 'una estrategia criolla para unificar lo disperso, afirmar su dominio, llenar el vacío de poder dejado por los españoles'.¹⁰² In light of this statement, and Rulfo's metaphorical critique of the continuity of colonial power structures through the theme of *caciquismo* in *PP*, it seems unlikely that the perpetuation of such dynamics in post-revolutionary official culture would have escaped his critical eye. Yet despite Rulfo's critical assessment of race relations in Mexico and his commitment to anthropological research, his extensive photographic engagement with this subject has received limited scholarly attention. This can be attributed in part to a critical tendency to read these works as visual extensions of his literary images, as evidenced by the description of the collection *Inframundo* (1984) as a 'photographic companion to *El Llano en llamas*', or the editorial decision to present his photographs alongside excerpts from his

¹⁰¹ Juan Rulfo, "No puedo hablar sobre lo que veo", interview by Juan Cruz, *El País*, August 19, 1979, iv.

¹⁰² Juan Rulfo "México y los mexicanos", in *Toda la obra*, 443.

literature in *Juan Rulfo's Mexico* (2002).¹⁰³ The only scholar to date to look beyond such superficial comparisons and consider the common political aspects of Rulfo's textual and visual corpora is Amit Thakkar, who questions whether his 'photographs of indigenous peoples in dances, festivals and processions are exotic and sentimental or ironic and challenging'.¹⁰⁴ In a more recent essay examining a photograph taken by Rulfo at Janitzio, Thakkar draws on the photographic theories of Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag to illustrate how this work cuts against assumptions of rural folkloricism.¹⁰⁵ Taking up Thakkar's invitation for further investigation into this subject, I examine one of Rulfo's lesser known Oaxacan photographs to explore how the returned gaze challenges conventional indigenista representational strategies by dramatising a fundamental disconnect between indigenous and mestizo worlds. Situating his photography for the first time in the context of changing mid-century intellectual and artistic perspectives on indigenism, I demonstrate how the estranging and subtly surrealist aspects of Rulfo's depiction of the indigenous body indicate a shift towards the more self-reflexive mode of indigenismo outlined by Villoro.

While I do not intend to follow previous critics in cataloguing the various parallels between Rulfo's literary and photographic imagery, his brief depiction of indigenous peoples in *PP* provides a useful starting point for an analysis of his photographs. Although early commentators of the novel believed the villagers of Comala to be indigenous, Rulfo later clarified that 'en la novela no hay ningún indio. Sólo una vez cuando bajan de Apango'.¹⁰⁶ Subsequent comments by Rulfo suggest that his reluctance to include

¹⁰³ Howard M. Fraser, "'Inframundo': Juan Rulfo's Photographic Companion to *El Llano En Llamas*", *Chasqui* 17, no. 2 (1988): 56-74; Juan Rulfo, *Juan Rulfo's Mexico*, trans. Margaret Sayers Peden (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002).

¹⁰⁴ Amit Thakkar, *The Fiction of Juan Rulfo: Irony, Revolution and Postcolonialism* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2012), 163.

¹⁰⁵ Amit Thakkar, "Studium and Punctum in Juan Rulfo's 'Puerta del cementerio de Janitzio'", in *Juan Rulfo's Creative World*, eds. Nuala Finnegan and Dylan Brennan (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in José Carlos González Boixo, "Aclaraciones de Juan Rulfo a su novela *Pedro Páramo*", in *Pedro Páramo* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2000), 247.

indigenous characters derived from profound anxieties about the problem of representing Mexico's cultural 'other'. Echoing the Peruvian critic Antonio Cornejo Polar's discussion of the 'perspectiva inevitablemente exterior' of the indigenista writer, Rulfo argued that it was impossible for the non-indigenous writer to access indigenous reality:¹⁰⁷

Resulta difícil, cuando no imposible, adentrarse en su mentalidad [...] Esto lo digo con conocimiento de causa, ya que, a pesar de ser Jefe del Departamento de Publicaciones del Instituto Nacional Indigenista, y habiendo publicado más de 80 obras de Antropología Social, todavía desconozco cómo y por qué motivos actúa la mente indígena.¹⁰⁸

Despite the conspicuous absence of indigenous characters from Rulfo's fiction, their fleeting appearance in fragment 48 of his novel is revealing. Although the singularity and brevity of this passage within the novel can in itself be interpreted as a subtle critique of post-revolutionary integrationist efforts, I would like to briefly highlight the specific role of the indigenous gaze in conveying the disjuncture between mestizo and indigenous communities. In this episode, Susana's maid Justina Díaz visits the market to buy rosemary from the indigenous vendors who have travelled from Apango during a torrential downpour. While the merchants converse amongst themselves, Justina's internal monologue is voiced separately to the reader, reducing her interaction with the *indios* to a wordless interplay of gazes:

Entró en el portal. Los indios voltearon a verla. Vio la mirada de todos como si la escudriñaran. Se detuvo en el primer puesto, compró diez centavos de hojas de romero, y regresó, seguida por las miradas en hilera de aquel montón de indios (274).

Here the scrutinising gazes of the Indians immediately mark Justina as an outsider and seem to almost drive her out of the marketplace. In Rulfo's photographic portraits of the native communities of Oaxaca, the gaze can be seen to perform a similar function in

¹⁰⁷ Antonio Cornejo Polar, "La novela indigenista: Un género contradictorio", in *Texto Crítico* 14 (1979): 61.

¹⁰⁸ Juan Rulfo, "Notas sobre la literatura indígena en México", in *Toda la obra*, 414.

conveying a profound disconnection between mestizo and indigenous worlds. While José Carlos González Boixo has claimed that Rulfo ‘rehúye que los personajes miren a la cámara (el espectador siente que esta mirada se dirige a él, lo cual remarca el propio acto fotográfico, algo que Rulfo quiere esconder)’, his Oaxacan portfolio includes numerous photographs of indigenous performers, onlookers and church-goers whose wary or at times openly hostile glances alert us to our external position as observers (figs.1.24-1.26).¹⁰⁹

These reactions draw attention to the uniquely invasive nature of photographic representation. Unlike painting (with the obvious exception of portraiture), in photography, the creator is always physically occupying the same space as his or her subjects at the time of the image’s production. Although in this sense, Rulfo’s photographs enact in real terms the spatial interaction between the mestizo and the indígena simulated in Rivera’s mural, this produces the opposite effect, creating a sense of distance between viewer and subject. While Rivera’s medium was seen to affirm an enduring cultural bond among the nation’s races due to its pre-Hispanic origins, the evidently intrusive presence of the camera in Rulfo’s indigenous portraits brings into sharp focus a profound cultural disjuncture between representer and represented. The returned gaze not only accentuates the position of exteriority to the Indian that indigenismo strived to overcome but also overturns the power dynamics inscribed in its conventional modes of visualisation. As photography theorist Margaret Olin explains, ‘the returned gaze [...] rescues the beheld’s sense of self. If you look back you cannot be possessed by the gaze of the other’.¹¹⁰ Olin’s assertion that the reciprocated gaze initiates ‘some kind of dialogism, in which a totalistic, hegemonic gaze is replaced by the mutual gaze of equality’ indicates the potential for

¹⁰⁹ José C. González Boixo, “Juan Rulfo, fotógrafo”, in *Territorios de la Mancha: Versiones y subversiones cervantinas en la literatura hispanoamericana: Actas del VI Congreso Internacional de la Asociación Española de Estudios Literarios Hispanoamericanos*, ed. Matías Barchino Pérez (Cuenca: Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla–La Mancha, 2007), 366; 368.

¹¹⁰ Margaret Olin, “Gaze”, in *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 217.

photography to produce a more egalitarian visual aesthetic of indigenismo in which, as Villoro suggests, mestizo and Indian ‘se reconozcan recíprocamente’.¹¹¹

This destabilising effect of the returned gaze is most striking in a photograph taken by Rulfo of two Mixe performers in the Zacatepec region in 1955 (fig.1.27). While at first glance this image adheres to the representational conventions of the native performance as spectacle, the indigenous gaze unsettles these assumptions by exposing the power relations implicated in the act of looking. The photograph depicts a man and a woman dressed in the costumes traditionally worn for the “Moros y cristianos” dance, a popular ritual dramatising the act of Conquest that was imported to Latin America during the Conquest. Like the majority of Rulfo’s portraits of indigenous performers, however, the scene is paradoxically devoid of movement. Here, the sensuous immediacy and sonority of Rivera’s vibrant imagery is replaced by a muted stillness that challenges performative notions of indigeneity (figs.1.28-1.31). A folkloric reading of the photograph is further obstructed by the female figure to the centre-right of the frame, who poses a number of optical difficulties for the viewer.¹¹² Like the literary spectres of Comala, this particular body resists immediate legibility. She is dressed in a modern coat and wig, but unlike her male companion her face is obscured by an expressionless black mask. A scarf wrapped around her head conceals the gap between the mask and her neck, momentarily creating the impression that it could in fact be her face. This unsettling visual ambiguity is enhanced by the monochromatic composition of the photograph which provides little tonal differentiation between the colour of the mask and her exposed skin. While the man’s clenched fist is slightly raised to reveal the protruding veins of his forearm, her arms,

¹¹¹ Olin, “Gaze”, 216; Villoro, *Los grandes momentos*, 229.

¹¹² Rulfo was clearly interested in foregrounding this particular woman as she appears in at least one other photograph (fig.1.32).

concealed beneath her coat, hang limply by her side, lending her body an almost doll-like appearance that is accentuated by the synthetic wig and stylised countenance of the mask.

These features and her slightly leaning posture recall another of Rulfo's contemporary photographs of a female mannequin in traditional dress and headscarf at a road-side stall (fig.1.33), suggesting a surrealist fascination with the uncanny doubling of animate and inanimate human forms. In his limited writings on photography, Rulfo praised the challenging ethnographic styles of Henri Cartier-Bresson and particularly Nacho López, and this subtle resemblance between his two photographs suggests comparisons with their surrealist-inflected depictions of mannequins from the 1930s and 1950s. López's photography, which Rulfo credited with revealing Mexico's 'más profunda realidad', explored the hidden realities lying beneath the surface of the familiar and experimented with unusual ocular motifs to expose the artifice of image production and the mechanics of voyeurism.¹¹³ In this photograph, Rulfo relies on similarly self-reflexive visual strategies by employing the mask as an estranging device that plays on the surrealist tension between appearances and reality.¹¹⁴ To date, the only critic to perceive surrealist elements in Rulfo's photography is André Stoll, who argues that his haunting portrayals of natural and architectural spaces reveal a history of colonial violence. Stoll asserts that while Rulfo's portraits of Oaxaca 'podría prometer auténticos paraísos del exotismo', they in fact open up 'una amplia variedad de perspectivas que inquietan al observador y le incitan a la reflexión sobre lo representado'.¹¹⁵ While Stoll focuses exclusively on Rulfo's landscape imagery, the photographer's surrealistic treatment of the indigenous body serves

¹¹³ Juan Rulfo, "Fotografías de Nacho López. De cuántas amarguras está hecha la dura vida", in *Toda la obra*, 435; Erica Segre, "The Complicit Eye: Directorial and Ocular Paradigms in Luis Buñuel's Mexican Films and Interdisciplinary Visuality", in *A Companion to Luis Buñuel*, eds. Rob Stone and Julián Daniel Gutiérrez-Albilla (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 212.

¹¹⁴ Pre-Hispanic masks and other vernacular objects attracted surrealist interest during the late 1930s and provided the stimulus for the International Surrealist Exhibition held in Mexico City in 1940. Rivera donated several masks to the Exhibition from his personal collection.

¹¹⁵ André Stoll, "Iniciación fotográfica en la mexicanidad: Los desconcertantes mundos surrealistas de Juan Rulfo", *Los murmullos: Boletín de la Fundación Juan Rulfo* 1, no.2 (1999): 55, 62.

a similar purpose in prompting reflection on the politics of representation in the context of Mexico's colonial history.

The role of the mask in inverting the conventional visual power dynamics of indigenista representation in this photograph can be illuminated by Barthes's concepts of studium and punctum. While Barthes uses the term studium to refer connotatively to the immediately decodable meaning of the image and the cultural context in which it is interpreted, he identifies the punctum as that destabilising detail which disrupts reception and 'pricks' the viewer. Although the studium-based aspects of Rulfo's photograph encourage an interpretation grounded in picturesque indigenism, these assumptions are disrupted by its punctum: the two black eye holes literally puncturing the mask's surface. Reversing the conventions of indigenista visual representation, whereby the passive native body is revealed by the gaze of an anonymous voyeur, the observer here becomes the object of an unanswerable indigenous gaze. This transformation of the indigenous subject from spectacle to spectator is of course particularly significant from a gender perspective as it overturns the scopophilic strategies of earlier indigenista representations of the indigenous female body.¹¹⁶

The viewer's immersion in the photograph is further disrupted by the mimeticism of the mask, which draws attention to the very process of image construction.¹¹⁷ As Shields asserts, in photography masking conventionally 'emphasises the processes of making and interpreting images while, at the same time, it calls attention to and even questions the act of representation'.¹¹⁸ The tension between visibility and concealment encapsulated by the

¹¹⁶ Rulfo's use of the mask foreshadows Graciela Iturbide's surrealist portraits of the Oaxacan Mixteca from the 1980s, which employ veils, costumes, headdresses and masks to create a challenging visual aesthetic that played on the notions of spectatorship and indigenous performativity (fig.1.34).

¹¹⁷ Masks and costumes of course carried particular symbolic weight in mid-century debates on national identity in Mexico. Paz dedicated a chapter of *El laberinto de la soledad* to the analysis of 'máscaras mexicanas' while Villoro described *indigenismo* as 'una historia real pero disfrazada'. Villoro, *Los grandes momentos*, 10.

¹¹⁸ Kathryn M. Shields, "Masking", in *Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Photography*, vol. 3, ed. Lynne Warren (London: Routledge, 2006), 1015.

mask establishes a direct link between the representational dynamics of Rulfo's photograph and the popular spectacle it documents. The popular 'danza de moros y cristianos', which re-enacts the defeat of the moors at the hands of the Spanish Christians, is considered the archetypal dance of conquest. Although these dances were originally introduced by the colonisers as a means of encouraging native communities to perform their own subordination, Max Harris has demonstrated how over time indigenous participants appropriated and reconfigured these theatrical narratives by working off a 'hidden transcript of dissent and resistance' to subtly critique these regimes.¹¹⁹ Harris identifies the dancers' masks as an apt metaphor for this disjuncture between the outward visible purpose of the performances and their subversive hidden agenda: 'masks, which are ordinarily thought to conceal, in this instance reveal resistance'.¹²⁰ The mask fulfills a similar symbolic function in Rulfo's photograph, pointing to two alternative readings generated by the studium-based surface appearance of the image or the subversive subtext revealed by its punctum.

The strategies employed by Rivera and Rulfo to visualise the native body are indicative of broader changes in how the relationship between the mestizo and the indígena was intellectually and artistically negotiated over the course of the post-revolution period. Exploiting the immersive qualities of his medium, Rivera aesthetically evoked indigenismo's 'impulse towards unity' in his murals by dramatically reducing the perceived distance between viewer and indigenous subject. Despite this unifying impulse, the muralist's works replicate the unidirectional mestizo gaze described by Villoro by framing the indigenous body as a passive object of contemplation. As I have demonstrated, the gaze operates to contrary effect in Rulfo's mid-century works where it forges a distance

¹¹⁹ Max Harris, *Aztecs, Moors, and Christians: Festivals of Reconquest in Mexico and Spain* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 25.

¹²⁰ Harris, *Aztecs, Moors, and Christians*, 23.

between viewer and subject and unsettles the colonising visual strategies employed by Rivera and other earlier indigenista visual artists. By situating Rulfo's photography within the more interrogatory intellectual climate that evolved from the late 1930s into the 1950s, my reading has attempted to shed light on the critically overlooked political dimensions of his visual corpus.

As a myth of ethnic solidarity, indigenismo complemented the master narratives of revolutionary unity being forged from the political centre in the immediate aftermath of the revolution's military phase. Through a comparative analysis of their plastic, literary and photographic works, this chapter has explored how the corporeal images produced by Rivera and Rulfo from the 1920s to the middle of the century express anxieties regarding the nation's political and cultural foundations. Rivera's murals at the PN and the SEP manipulate collective memory for the purposes of national unification by configuring the revolution as a singular heroic pantheon and creating a sense of proximity between the viewer and the indigenous 'other'. As we have seen, however, these myths of political and ethnic solidarity are subtly unsettled by Rulfo's mid-century literary and photographic works. As in Comala, where the villagers struggle to establish any meaningful form of communication that might lead to a collective understanding of the past, Rulfo's photographs convey a fundamental disconnect between mestizo and indigenous communities. Like the spectral bodies of *PP*, which speak to an unintelligible collective past, this particular work calls into question the link between visibility, knowledge and power established in Rivera's murals by foregrounding an elusive indigenous subject that resists complete visualisation.

Chapter Two

Architectural Anatomies: Stable Bodies and the Built Environment

‘Dio un golpe seco contra la tierra y
se fue desmoronando como si fuera un montón de piedras’.

Juan Rulfo, *Pedro Páramo* (1955)

‘Diego [...] es fundamentalmente, constructor, investigador y sobre todo, arquitecto. Es
arquitecto con su pintura, en su proceso de pensar y en el deseo apasionado de
estructurar una sociedad anónima, funcional y sólida’.

Frida Kahlo, “Retrato de Diego” (1949)

In the closing lines of *Pedro Páramo*, the eponymous tyrant is attacked by his inebriated son Abundio and collapses into ‘un montón de piedras’ (311). The *cacique*’s reduction to a pile of rubble metaphorically indicates the inorganic composition of his body, as already suggested by the etymological link between his first name and the word *pedra*, and highlights a form of corporeal fragmentation that is endemic in Comala. The same process of bodily disintegration is enacted by the feverish Susana San Juan, whose thoughts appear to rupture her body from within (282). Her reveries reveal this to be a phenomenon she has experienced since infancy, recalling how as a child she screamed so violently when her mother died ‘que mis manos tenían que haberse hecho pedazos estrujando su desesperación’ (264) and that her nurse Justina held her so tightly that ‘la hubiera apachurrado y hecho pedazos’ (276). From his own juvenile memories Páramo similarly remembers how the shadows cast on his mother’s figure in the doorway: ‘la devolvían en pedazos, despedazada’ (205). He later recalls the ‘cara despedazada’ of his

dead father (255) and we learn that the body of his son Miguel has been shattered after a fatal fall from his horse. Like his steed, described as ‘despedazado y carcomido por dentro’ (212), Miguel’s fractured face is concealed from the community at his wake.

Through this sustained representation of the decomposing human body, Rulfo’s novel brings to mind the fragmentary forms of analytical cubist painting. This earlier deconstructive phase of cubism, which lasted from approximately 1909 to 1912, involved splintering objects into a series of individual facets using a restricted monochromatic palette across the entire composition. While *PP* verbally recreates several analytical cubist features such as spatio-temporal dislocation, multiple perspectives and the use of a similarly limited range of expressive tools (as revealed through the repetition of ‘despedazar’ and ‘pedazo’), it most directly replicates its formal qualities through its architectural deconstruction of the body. As Picasso’s *Portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler* (1910) (fig.2.1) illustrates, the intermingling ochre tones of analytical composition formed an ambiguous visual environment in which the disintegrating objects at the centre of the painting appeared to break away into the surrounding space. According to Rosenblum, this lack of tonal or structural differentiation between object and space meant that ‘no fact of vision remained absolute [...] a sharp, firm outline could abruptly dissolve into a vibrant texture, a plane that defined the remoteness of the background could be perceived simultaneously in the immediate foreground’.¹ Rosenblum’s description of the comingling of object and space recalls the fictional world of Comala where characters appear in focus only to dissolve into a land that is ‘baldía y como en ruinas’ (268). As this interplay continues throughout the novel, the post-revolutionary village of Comala emerges as a site of ruination where the built landscape and its inhabitants are bound together in an ongoing process of decomposition. I argue that, through this sustained

¹ Robert Rosenblum, *Cubism and Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 9.

imagery of anatomical and architectural decay, Rulfo's novel dramatises the gradual unbuilding of a utopian post-revolutionary society that was constructed in the euphoric decades of the 1920s and 1930s.

Although the revolution was hailed as a moment of rupture from the Díaz regime, the positivist motto of 'orden y progreso' continued to haunt revolutionary rhetoric after 1920. Chapters Two and Three of the thesis explore how ideal Mexican bodies, both metaphorical and material, were configured according to these Porfirian ideals in the decades following the armed conflict. Before examining the models of progressive (re)productive citizenship that were promoted through the state's national development programme in Chapter Three, this chapter will explore how the concepts of collective societal order and stability were projected onto real bodies and built spaces during the 1920s and 1930s.

During the reconstruction phase that immediately followed the armed conflict, intellectuals sought to consolidate claims of national stability by promoting the ideal of a robust and physiologically standardised post-revolutionary body. As a state-endorsed social engineering programme converged with a disciplinary functionalist model of public architecture in the 1930s, an increasingly intimate bond developed between the ideal rational bodies of post-revolutionary citizens and the built spaces they were to inhabit. However, as fissures began to appear in the image of a socially cohesive and egalitarian body politic in the 1940s and 1950s, artists and intellectuals began to analyse and disassemble the symbolic and real social structures that had been erected during the institutional phase of the revolution (1920-1940). Between 1949 and 1953, this crisis assumed philosophical dimensions as thinkers dismantled existing models of national identity. Following Ramos's psychoanalytic study *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* (1934) a number of thinkers started to engage in a more self-reflexive analysis of

national questions to promote collective self-awareness and change.² Looking beyond the confines of cultural nationalism, intellectuals associated with the Grupo Hiperión such as Emilio Uranga, Leopoldo Zea and Luis Villoro committed to forging an emancipatory philosophy that would enable Mexicans to take account of their present circumstances. Deconstructing Vasconcelos's discourses of mestizo invincibility, Uranga's *Análisis del ser del mexicano* (1952) explored the fragile and vacillating nature of the Mexican, while Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950) reflected on the nation's struggle with profound isolation.

Contextualising Rivera's and Rulfo's works within this evolving intellectual landscape from the 1920s to the mid-1950s, this chapter explores how both artists contrastingly conceptualise the physical contours and boundaries of post-revolutionary society by examining how the relationship between bodies and built spaces is configured in their works. Frida Kahlo's assertion, quoted in my second epigraph, that Rivera was fundamentally an architect in his painting, thought process and desire to forge a functional Mexican society sheds light on an aspect of his pictorial production that has eluded scholarly attention to date. This chapter attempts to redress this omission by demonstrating how concepts of building design were integral to his visual aesthetic. After examining how Rivera's early state-commissioned murals uphold the biopolitical dimensions of the state's reconstruction project through their rationalised architectonic configuration of human body, I analyse the disciplinary spatial dimensions of his mural *The Making of a Fresco Showing The Building of a City* (1931). Re-examining this overlooked work in light of Rivera's relationship with the architect Juan O'Gorman and his contribution to post-revolutionary architectural debates, I demonstrate how it adopts functionalist principles to establish a parallel between spatial and bodily order.

² Doremus, *Culture, Politics and National Identity*, 156.

In the second part of the chapter, I consider how this dynamic between bodies and built spaces is unsettled in Rulfo's mid-century novel and photographs of Mexico City. Drawing on Benjamin's theoretical discussion of the ruin, I explore how the indeterminate disintegrating bodies and buildings depicted in *PP* share the fragmentary text's potential for renovation and reconstruction. Turning to Rulfo's photographs of the capital's soon-to-be-demolished railway lines, I discuss how the elusive urban subjects of these works disturb the vision of a disciplined urban landscape and populace projected by the mid-century functionalist architect and disciple of O'Gorman, Mario Pani, by drawing attention to an elusive community that lingers in the city's interstices. By contesting the equation between revolution and architectural-bodily order represented in Rivera's work, Rulfo's crumbling bodies and migratory urban subjects suggest the possibility of constructing new narratives beyond the official parameters of post-revolutionary society.

Part I: The Post-Revolutionary Return to Order: Disciplined Bodies, Disciplined Spaces

Reassembling the pieces of Rulfo's fragmented bodies necessarily leads us back to the 1920s when, as Jean Meyer asserts, the words 'revolution' and 'reconstruction' were synonymous.³ In an effort to consolidate political order and legitimise the state's claims of societal transformation, Obregón set about implementing an economic reconstruction programme and a new social infrastructure in the early 1920s. While Obregón pursued this project of socio-economic rehabilitation, state-associated intellectuals sought to rebuild the body politic by discursively constructing a new national subject. Despite their vehement rejection of positivism, these thinkers reinvigorated the biological analogies of

³ Jean Meyer, "Revolution and Reconstruction in the 1920s", in *Mexico since Independence*, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 204.

the *científicos* by metaphorically envisioning Mexico as a collective organism. The key intellectual architects of this post-revolutionary national body were Gamio and Vasconcelos, whose theoretical writings employed a language of construction to imagine an ideal subject characterised by specific racial, physiological and mental traits. In *Forjando patria*, Gamio outlined the necessary form which the population must take ‘para que ésta constituya y encarne una Patria poderosa y una nacionalidad coherente y definida’.⁴ Fusing imagery of engineering and metallurgy, Gamio uses the metaphor of the statue to describe Mexico’s historical efforts to construct a stable racially hybrid body politic. He explains how the Liberals constructed ‘una estatua hecha de todos los metales, que serían todas las razas de América’, but notes that this structure was ‘inconsistente y frágil’ and fell several times due to its lack of a solid indigenous foundation.⁵ Gamio calls on his fellow revolutionaries to rectify this structural weakness by building a new national body fortified by this racial component:

Toca hoy a los revolucionarios de México empuñar el mazo y ceñir el mandil forjador para hacer que surja del yunque milagroso la nueva patria hecha de hierro y de bronce confundidos. Ahí está el hierro [...]. Ahí está el bronce [...] ¡Batid hermanos!⁶

Directly linking racial uniformity with national stability, Gamio claims that ‘esta homogeneidad racial, esta unificación del tipo físico, esta avanzada y feliz fusión de razas, constituye la primera y más sólida base del nacionalismo’.⁷ Integral to this post-revolutionary drive for collective corporeal order and regularisation was the concept of *mestizaje*, which, as Ana María Alonso explains, provided ‘the only way to create homogeneity out of heterogeneity, unity out of fragmentation’ after the conflict.⁸ Like

⁴ Gamio, *Forjando patria*, 325.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁸ Ana María Alonso, “Conforming Disconformity: ‘Mestizaje’, Hybridity, and the Aesthetics of Mexican Nationalism”, *Cultural Anthropology* 19, no.4 (2004): 462.

Gamio, Vasconcelos equated the process of *forjar patria* with that of forging a new mestizo body. In his major treatise on racial miscegenation, *La raza cósmica* (1925), Vasconcelos declares that Mexico must ‘ir creando, como si dijéramos, el tejido celular que ha de servir de carne y sostén a la nueva aparición biológica’.⁹ In a subsequent essay, he exhorts his fellow countrymen to act as ‘constructores de un concepto de la vida totalmente nuevo’, pointing, like Gamio, to the possibility of creating a more stable collective self:

Somos inestables, pero los biólogos, creo, pueden entender fácilmente eso, pues somos un producto nuevo, una raza nueva, no completamente terminada. Creo que esa debilidad se puede superar definiendo claramente nuestras metas y proponiéndonos una meta clara y grandiosa.¹⁰

During the 1920s, Vasconcelos’s and Gamio’s organicist metaphors translated into official public health programmes that centred on the material bodies of Mexican citizens. As Elsa Muñiz asserts:

En México durante las primeras décadas del siglo, la perfección corporal estaba relacionada fundamentalmente con dos necesidades urgentes vinculadas al proceso de reconstrucción: la de una población sana y la de una sociedad civilizada a la altura de las más modernas del mundo, ambas con el afán de crear al nuevo mexicano.¹¹

The strategies of bodily regularisation through which this ideal ‘new Mexican’ was to be configured after the revolution constitute what in Foucauldian terms could be defined as the biopolitical agenda of the post-revolutionary state. In his lecture series *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault describes the emergence of disciplinary and regulatory technologies in the eighteenth century that sought to manage and regularise the vital

⁹ José Vasconcelos, *La raza cósmica. Misión de la raza iberoamericana. Notas de viajes a la América del Sur* (Barcelona: Agencia Mundial de librería, 1928), 18.

¹⁰ José Vasconcelos, “El evangelio del mestizo”, *Istor* no.25 (2006): 94, 93.

¹¹ Elsa Muñiz, *Cuerpo, representación y poder: México en los albores de la reconstrucción nacional, 1920-1934* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 2002), 103.

characteristics of both individuals and entire populations.¹² In post-revolutionary Mexico, these objectives were pursued through a social engineering programme that was implemented by Obregón and maintained by the subsequent administrations of Plutarco Elías Calles and Lázaro Cárdenas. Through the promotion of hygiene, physical education and behavioural reform relating to alcoholism and religious fanaticism, these initiatives looked to construct rational citizens that would embody the order and stability of the post-revolutionary body politic. As Krauze, Meyer and Reyes García explain, Calles and the intellectuals linked to his administration were driven by ‘una idea apasionadamente racionalista’ and wanted ‘que el cuerpo social termine por amoldarse, cueste lo que cueste a la cuadrícula de conceptos que su razón ha forjado’.¹³ Following the establishment of the Departamento de Salud Pública in 1925, public health initiatives evolved into a more coherent eugenics programme in the 1930s that advocated ‘la procreación de una nueva generación en la que los degenerados, enfermos y débiles sean eliminados’.¹⁴ As Nancy Leys Stepan has illustrated, Mexican anxieties regarding racial fitness and uniformity were part of a broader phenomenon during the inter-war period in both Europe and Latin America, where eugenics campaigns looked to liberate populations from colonial myths of racial inferiority and forge a homogenous national community.¹⁵ While in Mexico such initiatives aimed to engineer a radically new citizen-subject for the post-revolutionary era, they paradoxically recycled the hygienist discourses of the *científicos*, who viewed the

¹² Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, trans. David Macey (London: The Penguin Press, 2003), 249.

¹³ Enrique Krauze, Jean A. Meyer and Cayetano Reyes García, *La reconstrucción económica* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1977), 321.

¹⁴ “El departamento de Salubridad Pública hace una obra educativa acerca de los problemas de higiene racial”, *Eugenesia, Higiene y Cultura Física para el Mejoramiento de la Raza* 3, no. 47 (1935): 2.

¹⁵ Nancy Leys Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America* (London: Cornell University Press, 1991).

physiological improvement of individual bodies as material evidence of collective societal order.

Diego Rivera: Visual Architect of a New Citizenry

Efforts to economically, socially and physiologically rebuild post-revolutionary society were matched by the construction of a new artistic national identity under the supervision of Vasconcelos. Through its adoption of a simplified artistic language, post-revolutionary muralism followed a similar path to post-war artistic developments in Europe, where the restoration of socio-political order was articulated through a highly structured pictorial style. In 1925, German art historian Franz Roh (1890–1965) noted how:

The latest painting wants to offer us the image of something totally finished and complete, minutely formed, opposing it to our eternally fragmented and ragged lives as an archetype of integral structuring, down to the smallest details. Someday man too will be able to recreate himself in the perfection of this idea.¹⁶

This move towards more coherent visual forms was foreshadowed by the evolution of cubism, which progressed from its early ‘analytical’ stage toward a later ‘synthetic’ phase. While analytical cubism was characterised by splintered and disconnected forms, synthetic cubism sought to reintegrate these fragments into unified objects and spaces. This impulse for order formed the basis of the purist movement, founded by the artists Le Corbusier and Amédée Ozenfant. As Stanislaus von Moos explains, the aim of these artists was to create an artistic language compatible with ‘social order, scientific logic, and technological progress’ by searching for the geometric simplicity and purity of objects.¹⁷ Their 1918 manifesto, *Après le cubisme*, asserted that ‘the highest delectation of the human mind is

¹⁶ Franz Roh, “Magic Realism, Post-impressionism”, in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, trans. Wendy B. Faris (London: Duke University Press, 1995), 30.

¹⁷ Stanislaus von Moos, *Le Corbusier: Elements of a Synthesis* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1979), 56.

the perception of order and the greatest human satisfaction is the feeling of collaboration or participation in this order'.¹⁸ Central to the post-bellum artistic return to order was the symbolic restoration of a war-ravaged body that ultimately culminated in Le Corbusier's *Modulor*, a mathematically rationalised figure based on Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*.

This same emphasis on formal simplicity and stability characterised the visual language of post-revolutionary muralism. As Minister of Education, Vasconcelos encouraged the muralists to produce revolutionary narratives in an accessible visual language that would also reflect Mexico's new-found societal stability. Fusing classicism, futurism and pre-Colombian iconography, the muralists' unique brand of social realism was undeniably modern yet rooted in familiar visual forms. While the densely populated works of all three artists expressed Mexico's collective experience in distinctly physical terms, it was Rivera's consistent choice of common workers and peasants as his revolutionary protagonists that established him as the principal visual architect of the nation's new citizenry. In keeping with the contemporary post-revolutionary culture of renovation, the muralist combined the constructive techniques of proto-cubism with an emphasis on geometric stability to configure a visually concrete body at the centre of these post-revolutionary narratives.

Rivera's engagement with official discourses of physiological and racial regularisation is reflected in his first state-sponsored mural *Creación* (1922) (fig.2.2), located in the Anfiteatro Bolívar of the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria. This encaustic fresco depicting the dawning of a new racial order in Mexico reflects his close ideological ties to Vasconcelos during this earlier stage of his muralist career. To the fore of the mural,

¹⁸ Amédée Ozenfant and Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, "After Cubism", in *L'Esprit Nouveau: Purism in Paris, 1918-1925*, ed. Carol Eliel (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2001), 132-133.

on opposite sides, are seated a mestizo Adam and Eve around whom are positioned various allegorical figures representing the arts, the four cardinal virtues and the three theological virtues. The elongated forms and classical posture of these figures endows them with a monumentality that is accentuated by their exaggerated size. These esoteric figures frame a central concave space where a mestizo surrounded by the flora and fauna of the Tehuantepec region emerges from the tree of life. Positioned below a blue semi-circle from which energy emanates from three points, the figure stands with arms outspread in a posture, which as Coffey has also noted, is strikingly reminiscent of da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* (1487) (fig.2.3).¹⁹ Da Vinci's diagram, which portrays a male figure inscribed within a circle and a square, presents the mathematically proportioned human body as a model for architectural construction. Like da Vinci, who described this human figure as the 'cosmografia del minor mondo', that is, the expression of external cosmological balance, Rivera projects the mestizo as the embodiment of post-revolutionary societal order and stability. Da Vinci based his precisely proportioned figure on the description of the human body provided by Roman engineer Marcus Vitruvius Pollio. Vitruvius analysed the body as a system of mathematical ratios and drew a direct parallel between the components of a building and those of the human anatomy: 'As in the human body, from cubit, foot, palm, inch and other small parts comes the symmetric quality of eurhythmy, so is it in the completed building'.²⁰ Vitruvius concludes this analogy by arguing that both the human body and built structures should combine the three fundamental qualities of *firmitas* (strength), *utilitas* (functionality), and *venustas* (beauty).

¹⁹ Mary K. Coffey, "The 'Mexican Problem': Nation and 'Native', in Mexican Muralism and Cultural Discourse", in *The Social and the Real: Political Art of the 1930s in the Western Hemisphere*, eds. Alejandro Anreus et al. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 50.

²⁰ Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, vol. I, trans. Frank Granger (London: W. Heinemann, 1931), 27.

As Rivera was classically trained in Mexico and had recently returned from a visit to Italy in 1921, where he had immersed himself in classically-inspired Renaissance works, it is highly unlikely that he was unaware of these metaphorical connotations at the time of painting *Creación*.²¹ Although subtle, Rivera's evocation of da Vinci's and Vitruvius's scientifically ideal bodies is significant in the context of the contemporaneous disciplinary health campaigns that were underway in Mexico. Discussing the post-war bodily imagery of artists like Le Corbusier and Oskar Schlemmer, Tom Slevin argues that 'the modernist redeployment of the Vitruvian man is part of a phantasmic recuperation of the traumatised body according to the fantasised aesthetics of a mathematically objective and universal order'.²² By invoking Western art's definitive model of corporeal normativity and its connotations of architectural discipline, Rivera's Vitruvian mestizo provided the 'universal order' urgently needed to restore a damaged post-revolutionary Mexican body politic.

Rivera's employment of the Vitruvian model reveals a concern with the geometrical stability of forms that he maintained throughout his career. From 1898 to 1906, before he moved to Paris, Rivera attended courses in advanced mechanics and advanced geometry at the San Carlos Academy of Art and Architecture, acquiring a mathematical appreciation of pictorial composition and proportion that prepared him for the geometric principles of cubism. According to Oles, Rivera was drawn to the scientific exactitude of cubism, rejecting 'Picasso's intuitive approach, instead taking a highly rational and mathematical path shaped by arcane discussions of the fourth dimension'.²³

²¹ Rivera employs the Vitruvian posture again in the panel *Fraternidad* (1928) (fig.2.4), located on the third floor of the SEP.

²² Tom Slevin, *Visions of the Human: Art, World War I and The Modernist Subject* (London: Tauris, 2005), 189.

²³ James Oles, *Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco: The Mexican Muralists* (New York: Moma Artist Series, 2011), 8.

The course of Rivera's artistic development from the end of his time in Paris to his return to Mexico reveals how this scientific constructive approach formed the basis of his post-revolutionary aesthetic vision. During his Parisian cubist period (1913-1917), Rivera gradually moved away from the analytical mode towards the synthetic style that evolved after 1912. David Cottington summarises this transition in cubist figuration as:

The sequence of changes in their painting styles from about 1908 through which, in an initial phase, the objects, figures and landscapes they depicted were dismantled by means of juxtaposed views, broken contours, geometricization, *passage* and so on, in a process of painterly "analysis"; and in the second phase of which the flat interpenetrating planes that resulted from such "analysis" were the starting-points for a process of "synthesis" which reconstituted those subjects anew.²⁴

Rivera followed European artists such as Juan Gris and Fernand Léger, who by 1914 had moved away from the fragmentary abstractions of analytical cubism towards a constructivist synthetic approach that strived for 'the rehabilitation of the object in its integral form'.²⁵ As art historian Justino Fernández notes, this later cubist idiom was fundamentally 'concerned with structures', proposing that 'painting be the expression of an essential geometrical structure derived from objects, vision reduced to an ideal scheme'.²⁶ This transition in Rivera's style is exemplified by works such as *El matemático* (1918) (fig.2.5), which reveal his embrace of the more integrated pictorial form perfected by 'the master of "construction"', Paul Cézanne.²⁷

This new artistic vision harmonised with the environment Rivera discovered on his return to Mexico, where 'los colores existían con absoluta pureza' and ancient structures revealed 'la verdadera armadura de las cosas'.²⁸ Over the subsequent decades, Rivera

²⁴ David Cottington, *Cubism and its Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 167.

²⁵ Von Moos, *Le Corbusier, Elements of a Synthesis*, 56.

²⁶ Justino Fernández, *A Guide to Mexican Art: From its Beginnings to the Present*, trans. Joshua C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 154.

²⁷ Marnham, *Dreaming with His Eyes Open*, 137.

²⁸ Diego Rivera, "Volver a nacer", 367; Rivera, "De la libreta de apuntes de un pintor mexicano", in *Textos de arte*, 73.

harnessed this sense of formal purity and cohesion to construct a visually concrete post-revolutionary community in his murals. Along with the other muralists, Rivera promoted the concept of ‘integración plástica’, a method of fusing diverse aesthetic forms such as painting, sculpture and architecture within a single artwork. In a statement in 1921, Siquieros extended this interdisciplinary link by suggesting that the visual content of the murals should also be fundamentally architectural in form:

La base de la obra de arte, es la magnífica estructura geométrica de la forma con la concepción, engranaje y materialización arquitectural de los volúmenes y la perspectiva de los mismos, que haciendo “términos” crean la profundidad del “ambiente”; “crear volúmenes en el espacio”.²⁹

The muralists’ emphasis on the architectonic solidity of forms aligned their monumental works even more closely with the nation-building discourses of the 1920s. Rivera, who consistently described fresco creation as a form of physical labour, reinforced Siquieros’ architectural comparison by asserting that the visual artist must learn to ‘manejar útil y lógicamente formas, volúmenes y colores; es decir, hacer arquitectura’.³⁰

This architectonic construction of the body manifests itself most clearly in the murals Rivera painted for his first major fresco cycle at the SEP headquarters between 1923 and 1928. In *La raza cósmica*, Vasconcelos upholds the building as the concrete embodiment of his cosmic hybrid race through its combination of Spanish colonial architecture and pre-Columbian inspired mural decoration.³¹ In his inaugural speech at the Ministry in 1922, Vasconcelos described how its visionaries had aimed to ‘construir con

²⁹ David Alfaro Siqueiros, “Tres llamamientos de orientación actual a los pintores y escultores de la nueva generación americana”, *Vida Americana: revista norte centro y sudamericana de vanguardia*, May 1921, 2-3.

³⁰ Diego Rivera, “The new Mexican architecture: a house by Carlos Obregón /La nueva arquitectura mexicana: una casa de Carlos Obregón”, *Mexican Folkways* 2, no. 6 (1926): 26.

³¹ Vasconcelos, *La raza cósmica*, 40. Described by Claude Fell as the ‘ministro constructor’, Vasconcelos’ vision of societal reconstruction entailed an ambitious architectural programme involving the construction of 1,159 new schools and 455 new libraries. Claude Fell, *José Vasconcelos, los años del águila, 1920-1925: Educación, cultura e iberoamericanismo en el México postrevolucionario* (Mexico City: UNAM, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1989), 664.

amplitud, construir con solidez’ and praised the building as ‘un edificio símbolo’ whose noble and solid proportions embodied ‘la conciencia de la revolución madura’.³² The building’s solidity and concrete stability, which for Vasconcelos embodied the ideological function of the Ministry as a beacon of moral fortitude, was reflected in the painted bodies adorning its walls.³³ Across the 235 panels of this cycle, which depict a range of regional industries and festive celebrations, Rivera projects a vision of ‘la vida social de México como yo la veo, y por la realidad y el orden del presente, se mostrarán a las masas las posibilidades del futuro’.³⁴ By densely populating these panels with the bodies of ordinary Mexicans, Rivera articulated this aspirational societal vision through a fundamentally corporeal visual language. Repeatedly photographed in worker overalls and perched on scaffolds as he painted his stone canvases, Rivera cultivated a workman-like public image that emphasised his links with the contemporary culture of reconstruction. In the often overlooked panel *El pintor, el escultor y el arquitecto* (fig.2.6), located on the building’s third floor, the artist explicitly alludes to his role as the nation’s post-revolutionary visual architect by depicting himself with a floor plan, rather than a paintbrush, in hand.

While the works of the Patio de las Fiestas (1928-1929) on the third floor reflect Rivera’s later shift towards the more defined muscular physiques typical of Soviet socialist realism, the simplified and solid bodily forms found in the earlier panels on the ground floor of the Patio del Trabajo (1923-1924) illustrate the influence of post-impressionist figuration on his post-cubist works. As the subsequent paintings of Julio Castellanos, Manuel Rodríguez Lozano and Agustín Lazo attest, the model of robust corporeality

³² José Vasconcelos “Discurso inaugural del edificio de la SEP”, in *Obras completas*, vol.2 (Mexico City: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1957), 797; 800.

³³ Vasconcelos asserts that ‘estos pensamientos de erigir una obra en piedra coincidían con los otros de construir una organización moral, vasta y compleja’. Vasconcelos, “Discurso inaugural”, 797.

³⁴ Quoted in Antonio Rodríguez, *Guía de los murales de Diego Rivera en la Secretaría de Educación Pública* (Mexico City: SEP Cultura, 1984), 12.

forged by Rivera during this period exerted a lasting influence on the post-revolutionary artists during the following decades. Taking inspiration from the architectural style of Cézanne, who held that the artist should render nature with ‘the cylinder, the sphere and the cone’, Rivera identified these basic shapes as integral to the construction of visually stable figures:³⁵

Los cuerpos limitados por superficies planas, para ser concebidos en el espacio, tienen o que girar alrededor de ellos, para conocerlos, o hacerlos girar ante nuestro aparato ocular o nuestro aparato conceptual, y en ambos casos, esta rotación producirá necesariamente un cilindro, un cono, una esfera, o un cuerpo combinación de estos tres elementos.³⁶

This architectonic perspective on form is evident in panels such as *La quema de los Judas* (1923) (fig.2.7) in the Patio de las Fiestas, where bodies are presented as a composite of simplified geometric shapes. In this scene depicting the popular Mexican festival, three effigies of Judas lurch over a crowd of onlookers that disperses in an explosion of movement. While the bodies occupying the background remain obscured by the crowd, those to the fore are clearly defined by their physical solidity and vibrant attire. Rivera’s emphasis on the visual stability of the body is exemplified by the dark-skinned male figure to the centre-right of the composition who shields his head as he is swept backwards. His body is clearly composed of separate elements: a blocky rectangular torso, tubular limbs and disk-like hat, which together form a stable architectonic whole.

Drawing from synthetic cubist techniques, Rivera also exploited colour to reinforce the visual autonomy of these separate forms. While analytic cubism relied on a monochrome palette that blurred the distinction between object and space, synthetic artists employed vibrant colours to create greater formal definition. This strategy was again inspired by the proto-cubist ‘architectural plan’ of Cézanne who used ‘oppositions of

³⁵ Paul Cézanne, *Conversations with Cézanne*, ed. Michael Doran, trans. Julie Lawrence (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 121.

³⁶ Quoted in Loló de la Torriente, *Memoria y razón de Diego Rivera* (Mexico City: Renacimiento, 1959), 23.

shape and colour to build up, and, as it were, recreate form from within'.³⁷ In *La quema*, as in most of the ground floor panels, the use of strong contrasting colours serves to solidify individual bodies and clearly distinguish them from their equally concrete visual environment. The efficacy of tonal differentiation as an anatomical structuring device is again evident in the central figure, whose contrasting orange shirt, pale green trousers and brown hat accentuate the body's contours, providing it with a coherent overall structure. This early panel reveals how Rivera drew on Cézanne's highly structured pictorial style, which as the French painters Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger noted, achieved the 'profoundest reality' through its incorporation of bold colour and 'primordial volumes'.³⁸ Rivera also detected the primitive dimensions of this formal purism and linked it to pre-colonial artistic expression:

La asociación de los volúmenes de los objetos vivos, especialmente del cuerpo humano, a las formas elementales y puras – cilindro, cono, esfera, triángulo, cuadrado y círculo – contenidas en dos dimensiones y correspondiendo a los colores también en su pureza elemental así como el empleo de la diferenciación de calidades para el sentido táctil eran mucho más agudas y grandes como condiciones de culminación de la obra de arte plástico entre la producción africana, asiática, oceánica y americana en época y lugares, donde y cuando, estas relaciones del mundo no habían estado todavía holladas y contaminadas por la invasión europea.³⁹

Rivera's integration of the simplified volumetric forms of post-impressionism thus also dovetailed with his nativist agenda. By accentuating the weightiness of his figures, Rivera reflected Gamio's emphasis on the robustness of Mexico's native population.⁴⁰ Aside from emphasising corporeal solidity, Rivera's use of these reductive forms further reinforced his indigenista credentials by recalling the simplified figuration of pre-Conquest Aztec

³⁷ Roger Fry, "The Post-Impressionists-II", in *Post-Impressionists in England*, ed. J. B. Bullen (London: Routledge, 1988), 130.

³⁸ Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, "Cubism", in *Art in Theory, 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 189.

³⁹ Quoted in de la Torre, *Memoria y razón de Diego Rivera*, 25.

⁴⁰ Gamio, *Forjando patria*, 140.

texts such as the Codex Mendoza.⁴¹ Rivera's turn to neo-primitivism and formal purism in the corporeal imagery of these earlier panels suggest parallels with the post-war works of his former Parisian acquaintance Léger, whose 'tubist' works employed shading to configure human body parts like three-dimensional cylindrical shapes (fig.2.8). Justifying his shift away from cubist figuration, the French artist later explained: 'I had broken down the human body, so I set about putting it together again'.⁴²

Léger's technique of architecturally assembling visual objects out of different structural components was not new to Rivera. At San Carlos, Santiago Rebull had encouraged the young artist to use 'formas permanentes e imperecederas; es decir las figuras que trazan y construyen los arquitectos: el cilindro, el cono y la esfera'.⁴³ Although Rivera never pursued these principles to the same extent as Léger, a similar process of architectonic anatomical construction can be detected in panels such as *La quema* and *El tianguis* (1923-1924) (fig.2.9), also located on the first floor of the Patio de las Fiestas. In contrast to many of the more serene scenes on the ground floor, the agoraphobic quality of this larger tightly packed panel prefigures Rivera's epic triptych at the PN. Following a similar composition to *La quema*, the background of *El tianguis* is formed by a chaotic sea of white tarpaulins, *sombreros* and woven baskets. It is only at the very fore of the panel that the bulky bodies and oval faces of the indigenous sellers come into focus. In the right side of the panel (fig.2.10), an indigenous woman clad in a traditional *rebozo* is positioned with two female figures crouching to her right and a man lifting a large wooden crate to her left. Adopting a similar strategy to Léger, Rivera here stresses the three-dimensionality and structural integrity of her body by presenting it as a fusion of simplified geometric

⁴¹ David Craven, *Art and Revolution in Latin America, 1910-1990* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 40.

⁴² Quoted in José María Faerna, *Léger*, trans. Alberto Curotto (New York: Abrams, 1996), 30.

⁴³ Diego Rivera, "Las formas puras", in *Palabras ilustres*, 155.

shapes. Over her rebozo, which is configured as a kind of inverted pentagon, another shawl is composed from two triangular shapes that merge to form a spherical knot mirroring the rounded form of her head. Exploiting the packed environment of the market, Rivera reinforces the fixity and concreteness of the body by encouraging the viewer to draw a direct formal comparison between the bulbous heads and thick torsos of the market-goers with the spherical and rectangular objects surrounding them.

Rivera's Functionalism: The Spatial Politics of *The Making of a Fresco* (1931)

The corporeal forms of *La quema* and *El tianguis* reflected the artist's belief that 'toda forma viva puede incluirse en el cilindro, el cono, la esfera y sus combinaciones'.⁴⁴ Notably, this same geometric terminology resurfaces in an architectural review written by Rivera for the magazine *Mexican Folkways* in 1926. Discussing a group of utilitarian houses designed by Obregón Santacilia and fellow architect José Villagrán, Rivera's description of the house's 'ágiles tuberías y estáticos cilindros de los tinacos, los cubos y paralelogramos, sencillos y puros de las habitaciones' draws a direct link between its architectural structure and the geometric composition of his painted bodies.⁴⁵ Rivera goes on to praise the economical design of this 'vecindad de habitaciones baratas, higiénicas y con belleza (donde) todo dispendio de material fue evitado: utilizáronse como factores de belleza la economía de material y su máxima utilidad'.⁴⁶ These qualities of spatial efficiency, hygiene and structural order formed the basis of a functionalist model of architecture that would contribute to the state's biopolitical mission to shape healthy and orderly citizens in the 1930s. During that decade, as I will discuss in the following section,

⁴⁴ Quoted in de la Torre, *Memoria y razón de Diego Rivera*, 23.

⁴⁵ Rivera, "The new Mexican architecture/ La nueva arquitectura Mexicana", 26.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

Rivera developed an interest in this disciplinary model of architecture that would manifest itself in the spatial dimensions of his murals.

As the rapid population growth of Mexico City triggered housing and sanitation crises in the 1920s and 1930s, the demand for economical and hygienic architectural designs like those proposed by Obregón Santacilia and Villagrán grew increasingly urgent. After a decade of unsuccessful urban reforms, a systematic planning programme was launched in the 1930s to impose order on the urban landscape and promote Mexico's international image as a socially and industrially progressive nation. Although intellectuals of the post-revolution period outwardly repudiated the Eurocentrism of the Porfiriato and its imitation of French cultural models in particular, Mexican urban visionaries of the 1930s again turned to the French tradition in search of architectural theories, this time those of the Swiss-French artist and architect Le Corbusier. In keeping with his purist doctrine, Le Corbusier's architectural manifesto *Vers une architecture* (1923) addressed 'the necessity for order' in post-war European society by positing a functionalist architectural paradigm for the industrial age that was founded on the principles of strict geometric logic, hygiene and spatial efficiency.⁴⁷ Articulating his urban vision in anatomical terms, Le Corbusier conceptualised the city as a disciplined living organism, configuring a 'plan that arranges organs in order' according to their specific function.⁴⁸ Linking the formal austerity of his designs to their intended social function, the theorist argued that the regulating line provided a 'guarantee against wilfulness'.⁴⁹

This capacity of built spaces to maintain social order, a notion Le Corbusier expressed through the dictum 'Architecture or Revolution', paradoxically came to define post-revolutionary public architecture in Mexico from the 1930s into the 1960s, as the

⁴⁷ Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (London: Rodker, 1931), 67.

⁴⁸ Le Corbusier, *The Four Routes* (London: D. Dobson, 1947), 2.

⁴⁹ Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 67.

state continued to legitimise itself through its rhetorical commitment to the social ideals of the revolution.⁵⁰ In line with the discourses of physiological improvement that dominated the contemporary public health programme, urban theorists conceptualised the city as a sprawling and disproportioned body that, through strict spatial management, could be transformed into a disciplined and functional organism. Adopting Le Corbusier's medicalising language, Carlos Contreras, director of the Comisión Nacional de Planeación, argued that:

(La ciudad) no ha evolucionado como un organismo mediante la expansión correlativa de todas sus partes; de idéntica manera que el niño crece hasta la virilidad, no engordando simplemente, sino logrando que sus miembros, su cerebro y todos sus órganos se desarrollen en proporción para constituir un conjunto armonioso y racional.⁵¹

Contreras's corporeal metaphors reflected the distinctly physiological dimensions of the post-revolutionary architectural 'return to order'. As the urge to rationalise and cleanse the urban landscape gained momentum in the 1930s, public architecture became increasingly interlinked with the state's biopolitical objectives. During this decade, functionalism, which stressed the transformative capacity of the built environment to promote social order and shape healthy, disciplined bodies, emerged as the dominant architectural paradigm. The first significant interpreter of functionalism in Mexico was Juan O'Gorman, who drew heavily from Le Corbusier's theories to devise an architectural model based on cost efficiency, hygiene and spatial order as a solution to the urban crisis. In a speech delivered to the Mexican Society of Architects in 1933, O'Gorman reminded his colleagues that 'los hombres solo son animales racionales, y que proceder por cualquier sistema que no sea el máximo rendimiento con el mínimo esfuerzo, es no actuar racionalmente'.⁵² O'Gorman's

⁵⁰ Ibid., 280.

⁵¹ Carlos Contreras, "Editorial", *Planificación* no.12 (1928): 3.

⁵² Juan O'Gorman, "Conferencia en la sociedad de arquitectos Mexicanos", in *La palabra de Juan O'Gorman: selección de textos*, ed. Ida Rodríguez Prampolini (Mexico City: UNAM, 1983), 109.

direct linking of rational building construction with rational human behavior highlights a parallel between spatial and bodily discipline that lay at the heart of his functionalist philosophy. Despite abandoning his medical studies to pursue architecture, O’Gorman devoted his early career to converting Mexico’s built spaces into tools for physiological improvement. Echoing the Porfirian belief that ‘the construction of public works would transform the city into a health-giving environment’, O’Gorman prioritised hygiene, natural light and ventilation in his designs to promote ‘higiene del cuerpo y de la inteligencia’.⁵³

O’Gorman’s cost-effective and socially-minded designs appealed to a government seeking to accelerate economic reconstruction while maintaining a veneer of revolutionary progress. In 1931, Rivera introduced O’Gorman to the Minister of Public Education Narciso Bassols (1931-1934) who commissioned the architect to construct a series of primary schools in the capital. Building on his earlier designs for cellular high-rise housing complexes such as his *Proyecto de habitaciones colectivas para obreros* (1928), O’Gorman replicated Le Corbusier’s grid-based compositions to impose a strict spatial order on the schools, allocating precisely one square metre per child inside the buildings and five square metres in the playgrounds.⁵⁴ Rather than waste resources on superfluous decoration, O’Gorman intentionally exposed the structural components of the buildings as evidence of their structural ‘honesty’: ‘no se quiso disfrazar la construcción [...] sino que al revés, la muestra con toda sinceridad, orgullosa de ella’.⁵⁵

A childhood friend of Kahlo’s, O’Gorman became acquainted with Rivera while he was painting *Creación* (1922) and a strong friendship developed between the two that

⁵³ Agostoni, *Monuments of Progress*, xii; O’Gorman, “Conferencia en la sociedad de arquitectos Mexicanos”, 111.

⁵⁴ Valerie Fraser, *Building the New World: Studies in the Modern Architecture of Latin America, 1930-1960* (London: Verso, 2000), 48.

⁵⁵ Juan O’Gorman, “Escuelas Nuevas”, *Imagen* 1, no. 11 (1933): n.p.

in turn fostered Rivera's interest in rationalist design. Rivera's admiration of Obregón Santacilia's utilitarian building in the aforementioned review underscores a concern with aesthetic utility that was fundamental to his conception of proletarian art. Rivera's functionalist artistic ethic manifested itself not only in the socially committed thematic content of his murals but also in his utilitarian approach to pictorial space. Mirroring the spatial efficiency of O'Gorman's architectural designs, Rivera ensured that every inch of his epic compositions was meticulously structured and charged with narrative significance. Although this highly controlled approach to space underlies all of Rivera's post-revolutionary works, it manifests itself most clearly in his utopian vision of an industrial proletarian society in *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City* (fig.2.11), which he painted at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1931. In this rendering of a utopian worker-centred industrial society, Rivera draws on functionalist architectural principles to establish a parallel between the order and discipline of built spaces and the bodies inhabiting them.

Upon his arrival in the United States in 1929, Rivera departed from the more historically-themed content of his domestic murals to embrace a new industrial aesthetic inspired by the cityscapes of San Francisco, Detroit and New York. His visit to the US coincided with several major construction projects across the northern country and *The Making of a Fresco* captures his enthusiasm at man's creative capacity. In this piece, Rivera intertwines industrial progress and societal harmony by depicting the construction of a steel and concrete landscape through a system of productive human cooperation. Although executed in San Francisco, Alicia Azuela notes how 'the actual location is undefined, the workers could be at any site; the urban landscape could belong to any

country, any social system'.⁵⁶ This relative lack of geographical referents in comparison to his other US work, enables the viewer to read *The Making of a Fresco* as a more generalised representation of how Rivera envisioned the ideal modern proletarian society.

The mural's full title establishes a central comparison between the process of fresco production and the construction of a city, which is allegorised as a giant industrial worker in denim overalls, positioned to the centre of the composition. In front of this enormous figure, who is operating two giant levers, a large scaffold imposes a rigid structure across the visual field, dividing it into eight individual cells. The compartments to the centre and left of the lower section of the mural depict the conceptual stages of the city's design as donors and architects pour over sketches and blueprints, while the bottom left and upper cells show these plans being realised by groups of artists and manual workers. Two teams of sculptors are positioned in the lower and middle cells on the left-hand side, while Rivera and his assistants occupy the central section where they paint the mural of the giant worker. The artist summarised the mural's composition as follows:

El andamio subdivide al muro en compartimentos o celdas. Como sabemos el andamio es la preconstrucción indispensable de todo edificio. El andamio no es solamente visible, sino que constituye el marco mismo de la obra e indica la sencillez estructural y honradez plástica de la composición. Estos varios compartimentos, contienen todos los elementos de la construcción arquitectónica.⁵⁷

The most striking aspect of Rivera's commentary is his use of functionalist terminology. Firstly, he highlights the visibility of the scaffold, which functionally divides the composition into distinct 'celdas' or zones of activity. Recalling O'Gorman's description of the structural sincerity of his buildings, which proudly displayed rather than concealed

⁵⁶ Alicia Azuela, "Rivera and the Concept of Proletarian Art", in *Diego Rivera: A Retrospective*, ed. Stanton L. Catlin (Detroit: Detroit Institute of the Arts, 1986), 126.

⁵⁷ Diego Rivera, "Retrato de América", in *Textos de arte*, 214.

evidence of their own construction, he then explains how the exposed scaffold attests to the ‘sencillez estructural y honradez plástica’ of the finished work.

Rivera’s use of functionalist language is significant in light of the unique composition of this particular mural, which stands out in his *oeuvre* due to its distinctly house-like appearance. Unlike many of his Mexican murals which wrap around the interiors of entire buildings, *The Making* occupies a relatively confined physical space. Although the president of the San Francisco Art Commission, William Gerstle, originally offered Rivera a smaller section of wall, measuring just 120 feet, the artist opted for the larger but rather unusually shaped interior north wall of the Institute’s exhibition hall. While commentators have tended to focus solely on the visual field of the mural, a more holistic view, incorporating the entire north wall and its distinctive architectural features, provides a better understanding of the visual effects Rivera was trying to achieve. The need for an analytical approach encompassing these visual and structural elements is all the more convincing when we consider Rivera’s promotion of ‘integración plástica’.⁵⁸ The slanting ceiling of the gallery causes the upper part of the mural to taper in like a roof, creating a dolls-house effect that is enhanced by the scaffold’s vertical and horizontal division of the composition into separate compartments or ‘rooms’, and by the presence of a real door positioned below. Although the mural’s title refers to the process of building a city, Rivera’s subsequent claim that he intended to portray a scene of ‘técnicos, proyectistas y artistas trabajando juntos para hacer un edificio moderno’ indicates that this aspect of the fresco’s appearance was intentional.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ The muralist also stressed the need for plastic artists to have a strong grounding in architectural theory and attempted to introduce a substantial architectural element into the curriculum for students at the Escuela Central de Artes Plásticas during his brief time as director in 1929. Rafael López Rangel, *Diego Rivera y la arquitectura Mexicana* (Mexico City: SEP, Dirección General de Publicaciones y Medios, 1986), 24-26.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Laura Cortés Gutiérrez, *Diego Rivera* (Mexico City: SEP, Dirección General de Publicaciones y Medios, 1988), 151.

Rivera's configuration of the mural as a distinctly house-like functionalist building is relevant given the precise period in which it was executed. In 1929 the artist had commissioned O'Gorman to construct a functionalist house-studio for Frida Kahlo and himself in Avenida Altavista, San Ángel (fig.2.12). Construction for the studio, widely regarded as 'a triumph of functionalist principles', began that year and was completed in 1931, coinciding exactly with the beginning of Rivera's mural project in San Francisco.⁶⁰ Taking inspiration from the Paris studio designed by Le Corbusier for the artist Amédée Ozenfant in 1923, O'Gorman composed the complex as two conjoined cubic buildings, painted red and blue to indicate their function as separate living spaces for Rivera and Kahlo.⁶¹

Rivera's configuration of the mural as a distinctly house-like functionalist building encourages a comparative reading with O'Gorman's contemporaneous architectural project in Mexico which brings to light a number of compositional and theoretical similarities. The scaffold used to rigidly compartmentalise the mural space replicates the rigid cubic dimensions of the buildings whose 'interiors were expressed as distinct, separate elements'.⁶² The painted vertical wooden beams of the scaffold extend below the painted space to the floor of the gallery, creating the illusion of *pilotis*, while a set of steps to the right of the mural recall the external stairs leading to Kahlo's elevated quarters. These structural parallels are compounded by a chromatic correlation between the dark

⁶⁰ Robert Buffington, "Architecture", in *Mexico: An Encyclopedia of Contemporary Culture and History*, eds. Don M. Coerver et al. (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 24.

⁶¹ Toyo Ito's assertion that the dominant red building and its leaner blue counterpart resemble the rotund Rivera resting his hand on the shoulder of the svelte Frida again points to the persistent link in O'Gorman's functionalism between the architectural form of his buildings and the bodies, real or imagined, of their inhabitants. Toyo Ito, "El prodigio de la vanguardia y la pureza: Las casas de Diego Rivera y Frida Kahlo y la casa del arquitecto Juan O'Gorman", in *Casa O'Gorman 1929*, eds. Xavier Guzmán Urbiola, et al. (Mexico City: Editorial RM, 2015), 88.

⁶² Edward Burian, "The Architecture of Juan O'Gorman: Dichotomy and Drift", in *Modernity and The Architecture of Mexico*, ed. Edward Burian (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 137-138.

blues, reds and yellows used to decorate the exterior and interior walls of O’Gorman’s cubic buildings and the predominance of these primary colours in Rivera’s mural.

Rivera’s pictorial interpretation of functionalist theories is most strikingly revealed in his spatial arrangement of human bodies. By configuring the mural space as a functionalist house, *The Making of a Fresco* provides a striking visual metaphor for the rigid spatial architecture that characterised Rivera’s post-revolutionary murals. As Anna Indych-López demonstrates, Rivera achieved this sense of compositional structure by integrating the conceptual grid system used in cubist painting.⁶³ Composed of intersecting vertical and horizontal lines, this concealed architectural device facilitated the harmonious distribution and integration of objects within the pictorial field. While Indych-López provides a compelling commentary of how the conceptual grid functions as an organising principle in Rivera’s works, she overlooks its impact on the bodies contained within them. The panel *Los tejedores* (1923-1924) (fig.2.13), located on the first floor of the SEP, illustrates how Rivera used the cubist scaffolding system to spatially control figures within the visual field. In this portrait of three weavers working at a loom, the grid manifests itself in the intersecting lines of the threads and the wooden frames to which they are connected. This network of converging lines fixes the figures in space, rooting them respectively within the foreground, middle-ground and background of the composition.

Rivera employed the cubist grid as a device for restraining human figures in the majority of his murals; however, it manifests itself most clearly in his utopian projection of an industrial proletarian society at the San Francisco Art Institute. While the conceptual grid is subtly interwoven into the fabric of *Los tejedores*, this device is intentionally

⁶³ Anna Indych-López, “An Abstract Courbet: The Cubist Spaces of Rivera’s Murals”, in *Diego Rivera: The Cubist Portraits 1913 -1917*, ed. Sylvia Navarrete (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2009), 151.

revealed in *The Making*, where it is metaphorised by the large *trompe-l'oeil* wooden scaffold that divides the visual field into self-contained zones of activity.

While *The Making of a Fresco* (alternatively entitled *Workers in Control of Production*) ostensibly projects the empowerment of the worker within a modern industrial society, the grid scheme highlights the disciplinary spatial technologies at work within the mural. By making the grid an integral part of his utopian societal vision, Rivera establishes a parallel between architectural and collective social order that visually articulates Le Corbusier's belief that 'where order reigns, wellbeing reigns'.⁶⁴ More specifically, his use of the cellular grid in this particular mural can be aligned with the biopolitical dimensions of O'Gorman's functionalism in its equation of spatial and bodily discipline. In his 1976 lecture, Foucault employs the orthogonal grid design as a pertinent architecture metaphor for disciplinary networks, noting how it structurally articulates, 'in a sort of perpendicular way, the disciplinary mechanisms that controlled the body' by facilitating 'spontaneous policing or control'.⁶⁵ Dreyfus and Rabinow elaborate on Foucault's identification of the grid as the definitive architectural metaphor for disciplinary technologies:

In disciplinary technology the internal organisation of space depends on the principle of elementary partitioning into regular units. This space is based on a principle of presences and absences. In such a simple coding, each slot in the grid is assigned a value. These slots facilitate the application of techniques of discipline to the body. Once the grid is established, the principle reads, "Each individual has a place and each place has its individual".⁶⁶

In *The Making*, the architectural frame of the scaffold fulfils this disciplinary purpose by systematically grouping bodies in sections of the grid according to their specific role in the construction process. Through this technique of distribution, the scaffold functionally

⁶⁴ Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 54.

⁶⁵ Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 251.

⁶⁶ Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 155.

compartmentalises these bodies to maximise their efficiency while also uniting them within a single system of production. The correlation between architectural and bodily discipline suggested by this system is illuminated by comments made by Rivera in 1934. Reiterating O’Gorman’s earlier statements in more explicitly physiological terms, the artist claimed that:

el día de mañana, la arquitectura, madre de todas las artes plásticas, será racionalizada; arrojará las escamas leprosas de la ornamentación tradicional [...] para sustituirlos por habitats racionales [...] que serán el habitat adecuado al funcionamiento cerebral del hombre civilizado.⁶⁷

Rivera’s belief that the rationalisation of architecture would produce rational new subjects is further reflected in the relationship between architectural and anatomical forms within the mural, which, as in O’Gorman’s studio-house design, is conceptualised in highly fluid terms. The clearest example of this is the central visual metaphor of the mural, which equates the creation of a fresco depicting the body of a worker with the construction of a modern building. This comparison is reinforced by the subtle parallel between the composition lines being sketched on the wall beside the worker’s head and the steel cables being used to erect the skyscraper in the upper right-hand compartment of the mural. This intermingling of human and industrial elements again manifests itself in the distinctly anthropomorphic ventilators in the upper left-hand cell, composed of cylindrical trunks and tubular limbs, and the block of stone being chiselled by the sculptors below, which resembles the side profile of a human face. These subtle parallels are confirmed by the anatomical language employed by Rivera in his commentary. The muralist’s description of the sculptors giving ‘formas vivientes’ to the stone while the metal workers raise the ‘esqueleto de acero’ of the building again reflects the central logic of O’Gorman’s

⁶⁷ Diego Rivera, “Retrato de América”, in *Textos de arte*, 206.

functionalism, in which the properties of architectural structures and the bodies inhabiting them become interchangeable.

In the 1930s, the social value of functionalism came under scrutiny. O’Gorman and Rivera grew disillusioned with the state’s cynical use of rationalist architecture to maximise profit at the cost of the needs of the lower classes. It is likely that their shift away from functionalism and its biopolitical dimensions was also influenced by the discrediting of Lamarckian theories of inheritance by eugenicists towards the end of the decade, which largely invalidated the use of architecture as a tool for physiological or behavioural reform.⁶⁸ Rejecting the clean utilitarian aesthetics of functionalism, O’Gorman turned to easel painting in the 1940s and depicted a series of haunting ruinscapes. In works such as *Los Mitos* (1944) and *De unas ruinas nacen otras ruinas* (1949) (fig.2.14), architectural structures melt away and merge with roots and other organic material. O’Gorman’s turn to the seemingly functionless ruin in his rejection of disciplinary functionalist architecture strikingly foreshadows Rulfo’s artistic treatment of built spaces in the 1950s. In Rulfo’s mid-century novel and photographs of Mexico City, human bodies mirror the structural instability of their architectural environment and embrace the residual spaces of the ruin and the urban interstice as active sites of self-reflection and resistance.

⁶⁸ Patience A. Schell, “Eugenics, Policy and Practice in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Mexico”, in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, eds. Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 486.

Part II: Human and Architectural Indeterminacies: Ruins and Urban Interstices

Páramo's final glimpse of 'la tierra en ruinas' (311) as he crumbles in the novel's closing passage directly links the anatomical decomposition of the townsfolk with the physical disintegration of their surroundings. As Preciado proceeds through Comala, our attention is repeatedly drawn to the architectural decay of the village (197, 200, 135, 242). In their overlapping commentaries, Preciado and Páramo highlight fissures in the walls of Comala that are infiltrated by nostalgic voices and drops of water (247, 213). After abandoning Doña Eduviges's dilapidated home, Preciado stumbles upon an incestuous couple living in 'una casa con la mitad del techo caída' (235). His descriptions of the building's cracked walls and broken roof point to a state of architectural collapse that is subsequently mirrored in the decomposing body of the sister: 'El cuerpo de aquella mujer hecho de tierra, envuelto en costras de tierra, se desbarataba' (245). This description of bodily fragmentation fits within a broader poetics of undoing in the novel, where a proliferation of verbs bearing the prefix *des-*, such as *desmoronarse*, *desgajarse*, *despedazar* and *deshacerse* are applied to both the landscape and the human anatomy. Rulfo's literary depictions of structural and corporeal decay are echoed in his writings on Mexican architecture, where ruinous churches are compared to 'esqueletos mutilados', and again in his photographs of anthropomorphic ruins and eroding Mayan statues (figs.2.15- 2.16).⁶⁹

In his analysis of *PP*, Lanin A. Gyurko argues that fragmentation 'defines the basic themes of the novel: disintegration of the universe, loss of an integral self, and the hopelessness of redemption'.⁷⁰ Patricia Reagan supports this view, stating that in Comala

⁶⁹ Juan Rulfo, "Tutotepec", in *Juan Rulfo: Letras e imágenes*, ed. Víctor Jiménez (Mexico City: Editorial RM, 2002), 34.

⁷⁰ Lanin A. Gyurko, "Twentieth Century Fiction", in *Mexican Literature: A History*, ed. David William Foster (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 263.

'hopelessness is all that is left for the future'.⁷¹ While many critics have identified the novel's use of fragmentation as evidence of a crushingly pessimistic societal vision, the potentially constructive dimensions of ruination in Rulfo's work merit consideration, particularly in light of the previously discussed transition towards a more self-reflexive attitude towards national issues by mid-century thinkers. During this period, intellectuals' efforts to deconstruct established cultural models by exploring the fragility of the national character found parallels in artistic production. This shift began in the 1940s, with the innovative narratives of Yáñez, José Revueltas and Rodolfo Usigli offering a mid-century reappraisal of the Revolution and the state's commitment to its utopian social ideals. For Fuentes, this move from a didactic stance towards a more interrogatory tone constituted a defining feature of the modern Latin American novel. Underlining the fundamentally constructive nature of this critical approach, he asserts that 'la nueva novela hispanoamericana actual no se resigna a ser solo documento de protesta sino que aspira a constituir una verdadera creación'.⁷² Situating Rulfo within this period of significant intellectual and transition encourages us to look beyond the apparent hopelessness of his literary vision and consider how his corporeal fragments and ruins may function as tools for constructive self-reflection and criticism.

The constructive dimensions of Rulfo's fragmentary aesthetic can be better understood in light of Walter Benjamin's discussion of the ruin in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928). In this seminal work, Benjamin describes the act of allegorical interpretation as a redemptive process that can lead to creative action in the present. Diverging from the Romantic tendency to project the ruin as an external referent for the author's melancholia, Benjamin interprets it, along with the fragmentary baroque corpse,

⁷¹ Patricia Reagan, *Deconstructing Paradise: Inverted Religious Symbolism in Twentieth-Century Latin American Literature* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016), 9.

⁷² Fuentes, *La nueva novela hispanoamericana*, 13.

as evidence of the politically progressive force of allegory in its capacity to destroy the symbol's 'false illusion of totality'.⁷³ As an emblem of an absent wholeness, allegorical contemplation initiates a constructive act of deconstruction through which fragments of the past can be used to build new structures. In asserting that 'allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things', Benjamin politicises the ruin by conceptualising it as an allegory for the very process of thinking.⁷⁴ Following a similar line of argumentation, Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle have more recently identified an 'unstable semantic potential' in the ruin's architectural incompleteness that 'signals the impending breakdown of meaning and therefore fosters intensive compensatory discursive activity'.⁷⁵

In formal terms, this productive capacity of the unfinished structure is exemplified by the fragmentary nature of Rulfo's novel, which requires the reader to creatively intervene and reconstruct the narrative's events. The novel's lack of narrative scaffolding constituted a point of contention for early critics such as Archibaldo Burns, who lamented that 'les falta estructuración (a los personajes) como arquitectura al relato'.⁷⁶ However, Benjamin's reading of the ruin as a symbol of intellectual productivity allows us to consider how the ruinous textual landscape of *PP* is not hopeless but rather charged with potential. Rulfo described how he intentionally removed any narrative structure and moral framework from the novel in order to actively engage readers in the production of its meaning:

La intención fue [...] quitarle las explicaciones. Era un libro un poco didáctico, casi pedagógico: daba clases de moral y no sé cuántas cosas y todo eso tuve que eliminarlo

⁷³ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), 176.

⁷⁴ Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 178.

⁷⁵ Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle, introduction to *Ruins of Modernity*, ed. Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle (London: Duke University Press, 2010), 6.

⁷⁶ Archibaldo Burns, "Pedro Páramo o la unción y la gallina", *México en la Cultura, Novedades*, May 15, 1955, 3.

porque no soy muy moralista y además [...] sí, fui dejando algunos hilos colgando para que el lector me [...] pues, cooperara con el autor en la lectura. Entonces, es un libro de cooperación. Si el lector no coopera, no lo entiende; él tiene que añadirle lo que le falta.⁷⁷

Rulfo's comments align his novel with Barthes's notion of the *texte scriptible*. In contrast to the closed *texte lisible*, which communicates its pre-determined meaning through a legible format, Barthes describes how the unconventional 'writerly' text is characterised by an unsettling sense of loss that encourages the reader to actively generate its meaning in a more self-reflective manner. In this sense, narrative fragmentation in *PP* functions as a political strategy which, in contrast to Rivera's highly didactic aesthetic model, requires the reader to become what Julio Cortázar terms a 'lector cómplice' by actively participating in the act of narrative construction.⁷⁸

For Benjamin, the allegorical destruction of the organic whole is powerfully embodied by the corpse whose corporeal remnants fall 'away from the body piece by piece'.⁷⁹ The potential for these bodily fragments to generate new and evolving forms of meaning, like Barthes's unfinished text, is revealed to Benjamin through the regenerative nature of the corpse, which exists in a transitional state of ongoing decay.⁸⁰ This sense of potentiality is encapsulated by the ruinous Rulfian body, which is engaged in a continuous process of decomposition. Despite the apparent abruptness of his collapse in the novel's closing lines, we learn that in fact Páramo 'estaba acostumbrado a ver morir cada uno de sus pedazos' (310). This description draws attention to the ongoing process of bodily decay that is staged throughout Rulfo's novel. In conversation with his daughter Susana, Bartolomé San Juan also highlights the gradual nature of the villagers' bodily decomposition when he describes how the world weighs down upon them,

⁷⁷ Rulfo, "Juan Rulfo examina su narrativa", 453.

⁷⁸ Julio Cortázar, *Rayuela*, eds. Julio Ortega and Saúl Yurkiévich (Madrid: C.S.I.C, 1991), 326.

⁷⁹ Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 218.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 218.

‘deshaciéndonos en pedazos’ (272). As in the novel’s closing lines, where we are told that Páramo ‘se fue desmoronando’ (311), Bartolomé’s use of the gerund form of the verb *deshacerse* highlights how these bodies are engaged in a dynamic process of physiological transformation that is still unfinished. In contrast to Rivera’s static architectonic figures, this recurring use of the present-continuous tense endows Rulfo’s deteriorating bodies with a changeable quality which, as Bruce Dean Willis asserts, is more readily expressed through literary rather than pictorial means. In contrast to the fixity of the painted image, he notes that, due to the temporal properties of literature ‘the aging of a character’s body, for instance, can be depicted after the appropriate narrative exigencies to suggest the passage of time, or the bodily effects of an illness, operation or accident can be relayed in ways that allow for a comparison of before and after’.⁸¹ Embracing this inherent mutability of the literary body, Rulfo’s metaphors of corporeal ruination indicate a capacity for ongoing transformation that is denied to the monolithic mestizos of Rivera’s murals.

The multiplicity and mutability of signification that arises from allegorical dismemberment is reflected in the instability of identity in Comala, where characters are constantly assuming new forms. Damiana takes the place of Eduvigés (222), who had previously replaced Dolores on her wedding night (207). Preciado later mistakes Dorotea for Susana, although her name may in fact be Doroteo (246), and later believes Damiana to be Eduvigés (222). The vengeful Abundio returns in the final stages of the novel as the double of the dead Preciado to kill Páramo while Susana’s use of the title ‘padre’ to address both Rentería and Bartolomé renders them interchangeable. These literary examples again speak to the pictorial mutations of cubism. Comala’s shapeshifting inhabitants resemble what Rosenblum describes as the ‘strangely unstable and shifting’ nature of analytic

⁸¹ Bruce Dean Willis, *Corporeality in Early Twentieth-Century Latin American Literature: Body Articulations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 7.

figuration, where forms are engaged in a constant decomposition and recomposition of reality.⁸²

For Svetlyana Boym, the fertile potentiality of the ruin derives from its spatio-temporal interstitiality. Caught between past and present, absence and presence, the ruin's indeterminacy prompts reflection on a 'past that could have been and a future that never took place'.⁸³ Boym's identification of the ruin's liminal temporal territory as a space for reflection and speculation aligns with cultural anthropologist Victor Turner's understanding of the liminal as 'the 'subjunctive mood' of culture, the mood of maybe, might be, as-if, hypothesis, fantasy, conjecture, desire'.⁸⁴ Boym's assertion that ruins invite us into 'a labyrinth of ambivalent language - no longer, not yet, nevertheless, albeit' resonates in the dream-like Comala, where imperfect subjunctive 'como si' clauses abound and the villagers repeatedly conjecture about hypothetical situations.⁸⁵ Situated betwixt and between different structural and temporal states, Rulfo's ruinous village, where a sense of expectation hangs in the air ('todo parecía estar como en espera de algo', 195) exemplifies Turner's interpretation of liminal space as 'a storehouse of possibilities [...] striving after new forms and structures'.⁸⁶ Indeed, the verb *esperar*, which captures this sense of anticipation and futurity, appears 52 times within the novel's 69 fragments. These interpretations of the liminal ruin as a metaphor for intellectual inquiry and creativity indicate how Rulfo's incomplete textual and corporeal structures can be read as

⁸² Robert Rosenblum, *Cubism and Twentieth-Century Art*, 30.

⁸³ Svetlana Boym, "Ruins of the Avant Garde, From Tatlin's Tower to Paper Architecture", in *Ruins of Modernity*, eds. Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle (London: Duke University Press, 2010), 58.

⁸⁴ Victor W. Turner, "Are there Universals of Performance in Myth, Ritual, and Drama?", in *By Means of Performance*, eds. Richard Schechner and Willa Appel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 12.

⁸⁵ Boym, "Ruins of the Avant Garde", 58.

⁸⁶ Turner, "Are there Universals of Performance in Myth, Ritual, and Drama?", 12.

constructive sites, provoking reassessments of the past while also fostering creative speculation about alternative structures for the future.

This concept of *liminality*, derived from the Latin *limen*, meaning threshold, draws our attention to another prominent architectural motif in *PP*. In a youthful recollection of his mother, Páramo recalls the figure of ‘aquella mujer, de pie en el umbral; su cuerpo impidiendo la llegada del día’ (214) and later describes her contorted silhouette in the doorway as she weeps (255). On various occasions, he, Bartolomé San Juan and Padre Rentería all observe Susana San Juan from the threshold of her bedroom (301, 288, 279). These recurring references to doorways in the novel highlight the restlessness of Comala’s inhabitants who appear fleetingly only to dissolve away again into the landscape. This constant movement is facilitated by the porosity of Comala’s architectural environment, indicated by recurring references to open or missing doors and windows both in Preciado’s descriptions and the memories of the other villagers (197, 200, 213, 264). Like his father, who appears at the window of *la chaca* Margarita, Miguel Páramo climbs through the bedroom window of Ana Rentería, Padre Rentería’s niece, when he visits her after nightfall.

This liminal positioning of the body is visually reproduced in several of Rulfo’s rural photographs depicting townspeople in the doorways and windows of dilapidated buildings (figs.2.17-2.18). While Rulfo’s deployment of the threshold as a visual framing device in the novel reveals his compositional sensibilities as a photographer, it more importantly highlights the liminality of a spectral Rulfian body that lingers in the indeterminate zones between past and present, life and death, memory and reality. For Turner, the inherently ambiguous condition of such marginalised liminal persons, or ‘threshold people’ as he defines them, enables them to ‘elude or slip through the network

of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space'.⁸⁷ Like Turner, who claims that liminal entities stand 'betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, conventions and ceremonial', Bjørn Thomassen defines liminality as a state of 'a potentially unlimited freedom from any kind of structure'.⁸⁸ Understanding Rulfo's 'threshold people' as a community somehow resistant to structure allows us to consider how, through their spatial, temporal and ontological liminality, the villagers inhabit a precarious yet potentially liberating state of indeterminacy.

Rulfo's Urban Photographs: Interstitial Bodies and the Fragmentation of Built Space

This idea that the body's 'in-betweenness' can constitute an empowered protest against established structure provides an interesting lens through which to consider Rulfo's mid-century photographs of Mexico City. Taken in 1956 at the height of *desarrollismo*, Rulfo's photographs of Mexico City visually document the old railyards to the north of the capital shortly before they were demolished to make way for a functionalist housing unit designed by the architect Mario Pani and replaced by the new Terminal del Valle de Mexico in Tlalnepantla. Rulfo's photographs, published in the collection *En los ferrocarriles* (2014), were the product of a collaborative project with director Roberto Gavaldón, who invited Rulfo to work as a photographer on a documentary commissioned by the state-owned railway company Ferrocarriles Nacionales de México.⁸⁹ This short piece of government propaganda entitled *Terminal del Valle de México* (1956) was to document the success of the urban renewal project by contrasting the degenerating old railway lines and the

⁸⁷ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 95.

⁸⁸ Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 95; Bjørn Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-Between* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 1.

⁸⁹ Juan Rulfo, *En los ferrocarriles: Juan Rulfo: fotografías*, ed. Víctor Jiménez (Mexico City: UNAM, Editorial RM, 2014). All photographs discussed in this chapter are included in this publication.

surrounding working-class districts with the pristine new installations in the suburbs. Of the 140 photographs Rulfo produced during this period, however, a distinction is discernible between the images that uphold the aims of the documentary, such as his helicopter views of the city and the new railway terminal, and those more intimate scenes of urban life to which his lens appears to have been drawn. As in the case of the photographs Rulfo produced for the Comisión del Papalopan, discussed in the previous chapter, these works subtly destabilise the official image they were intended to promote. Deviating from the intentions of Gavaldón's film, Rulfo's lens challenges Pani's functionalist vision of a disciplined and totalised urban landscape and population by revealing a mobile urban citizenry that slips between the cracks and crevices of the built environment. Offering a visual urban counterpoint to his fictional works of the same period, which generally present a neglected post-revolutionary rural *campesinado*, Rulfo's photographs undermine contemporary rhetoric of national progress by depicting a disenfranchised urban community on the margins of the state's modernisation project. Drawing attention to elusive, ill-defined bodies and the indeterminate spaces they inhabit, these photographs unsettle the principles of visibility and socio-spatial discipline that defined Pani's functionalist plans for an orderly urban landscape and population.

After 1940, urban planning and architecture in Mexico reflected the shifting priorities of a government that increasingly measured national progress in economic and industrial, rather than social terms. Aggressive capitalist policies resulted in the 'Mexican miracle', a phase of unprecedented economic growth between 1940 and 1968 that triggered a wave of immigration to the capital. During this period rural migrants and rail workers flocked to the peripheral working-class *vecindades* that had evolved around the railroads during the Porfiriato, leading to chronic overcrowding and sanitation problems.

As conditions worsened in the 1940s and 1950s, functionalism was adopted as state policy and the disciplinary dimensions of public architecture became increasingly pronounced.

Pani, one of the most influential inheritors of O’Gorman’s functionalist legacy in Mexico, responded to the housing crisis by proposing high-rise residential units known as *multifamiliares* as a hygienic and spatially efficient alternative to the slums and sprawling make-shift settlements to the north of the city. Employing Le Corbusien biological analogies, Pani identified the city’s informal areas as sites of disease and moral corruption within the urban organism. In an article entitled “Penicilina para la ciudad” (1950), the architect writes ‘hacer patria es eso: hacerla purificando la podredumbre’ and describes this process of urban spatial cleansing in disturbingly violent terms: ‘el problema es tremendo, pero hay que proceder con energía. Meter dinamita, como ya dije, y regar petróleo’.⁹⁰ With the support of government commissions, Pani carried out a number of functionalist social-housing projects such as the Multifamiliar Miguel Alemán (1949) and the Multifamiliar Presidente Juárez (1952). These self-contained complexes followed a spatially restrictive cellular grid-based design that led inhabitants to compare the density of the 1949 complex to that a concentration camp and, as O’Gorman later pointed out, earned it the nickname of ‘la penitenciaría’.⁹¹

The Conjunto Urbano Nonoalco Tlatelolco was Pani’s most ambitious residential project to date, consisting of 101 apartment buildings as well as clinics, recreational areas and schools for its 100,000 residents. While Pani’s monumental unit appeared to uphold the social ideals of the Revolution by providing affordable housing for multiple families, its design was rooted in the Le Corbusien principles of discipline, efficiency and

⁹⁰ Mario Pani, “Penicilina Para La Ciudad”, *Arquitectura/México* no.30 (February 1950): 312.

⁹¹ A.A. Escobedo, “La vida en el multifamiliar”, *Arquitectura* no.33 (1952): 181; Juan O’Gorman, “Notas sobre arquitectura”, in *La Palabra de Juan O’Gorman: selección de textos*, ed. Ida Rodríguez Prampolini (Mexico City: UNAM, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1983), 138.

surveillance. Reaffirming his faith in architecture as a strategy of behavioural reform, Pani believed that transferring working-class families from sprawling *vecindades* to the ‘células urbanas’ of his new concrete residential blocks would contribute to the healthy development of the city and transform these ‘individuos fracasados’ into civilised citizens.⁹² This socially disciplining function of the complex was underlined by president Adolfo López Mateos at its inauguration in 1964 when, echoing the Le Corbusien dictum of ‘architecture or revolution’, he reminded the public that ‘una revolución pacífica evita una revolución violenta’.⁹³

In Rulfo’s photographs, however, Pani’s vision of urban spatial order and human containment is unsettled by the manner in which bodies negotiate the built environment. By combining aerial and ground level shots, the photographs juxtapose panoramic views of the city’s modernising landscape with glimpses of its poorest inhabitants living precariously in the environs of the old rail yards. The distinction between these alternative perspectives of urban reality is illuminated by de Certeau in his essay “Walking in the City” (1984). Using the dualistic framework of the ‘concept’ city and the ‘migrational’ city, de Certeau contrasts the orderliness of the urban landscape surveyed from a height, with the movements of city dwellers on the ground who complicate its legibility.⁹⁴ Surveying Manhattan from the top of the World Trade Centre, he describes how this elevated position provides him with a sense of panoptic mastery and accentuates the structural definition of the territory below by reducing the city’s streets and buildings to a rigid and highly legible ‘text’ or ‘texturology’.⁹⁵ De Certeau explains how this

⁹² Pani, “Penicilina para la ciudad”, 312.

⁹³ Quoted in Rubén Cantú Chapa, *Tlatelolco: la autoadministración en unidades habitacionales: gestión urbana y planificación* (Mexico City: Plaza y Valdés, 2001), 124.

⁹⁴ Michel de Certeau, “Walking in the City”, in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1999), 128.

⁹⁵ De Certeau, “Walking in the City”, 127.

meticulously ordered view of the city, which he identifies with the gaze of the all-seeing urban planner or architect, is challenged by spatial strategies of resistance enacted by the improvised movements of the everyday pedestrian on the ground.

For the purposes of the documentary project, Rulfo and Gavaldón were granted access to a helicopter in order to view the new installations from a height. By integrating aerial perspectives, Gavaldón's film not only showcased the success of contemporary urban modernisation but also the technologically sophisticated forms of urban cartography available at the time. Advances in cartographic technology resulting from Mexico's participation in World War II during the Camacho administration enabled aerial photography companies to offer planners more precise and comprehensive methods of visualising urban territories. Rulfo captures this totalising perception of the city in photographs of the new installations in the Terminal del Valle de México and other bird's-eye shots of buildings such as the Lotería Nacional skyscraper, where urban spaces are reduced to a legible design of interlocking geometric forms (figs.2.19-2.20). Siegfried Kracauer's assertion that in aerial images 'all spatial configurations are incorporated into the central archive in unusual combinations which distance them from human proximity' is reflected in the reduction or total elimination of human presence from these photographs.⁹⁶

In Rulfo's ground-level shots, however, this geometric stability is unsettled by human agitation. Like de Certeau's 'spatial practitioners', Rulfo's subjects on the ground trouble the structural integrity of the 'conceptual city' devised by post-revolutionary planners through their constant and unregulated movement.⁹⁷ Resisting the biopolitics of spatial control at the heart of Pani's modernist project, these urban bodies display a fluid

⁹⁶ Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (London: Harvard University Press, 1995), 62.

⁹⁷ De Certeau, "Walking in the City", 128.

approach to spatiality. In one of the most striking photographs of the collection, four indistinct figures cross a derelict railway line at Nonoalco (fig.2.21). Like the spectral villagers of Comala, these blurred forms flit ghost-like across the unsheltered landscape at different points and in different directions, as if seeking refuge in the shadowy ruins on the far side. A similar emphasis on human movement is evident in photographs of pedestrians hastily traversing the railway lines at the Calzada de Nonoalco (fig.2.22) and of women crossing the tracks in front of a freight train at the Tacuba Station (fig.2.23). In most of these photographs, human activity is concentrated around the railway tracks, constituting a point of confluence for the intersecting paths of local pedestrians. Indeed, an entire section of the published collection entitled ‘*Crucero-Crossing*’ is dedicated specifically to photographs documenting this ebb and flow of human movement at the intersections between the railway and the adjoining roads.⁹⁸

Like the female indigenous performer discussed in the previous chapter, several of the bodies foregrounded in these photographs resist immediate legibility. Technical aspects of these images, such as blurring effect produced by the rapid movement of the pedestrians, accentuates the elusiveness of these figures by obscuring certain body parts. While such visual imprecision in handheld photography is most commonly caused by the movement of the subject it can also indicate motion on the part of the photographer. The range of angles displayed in these photographs suggest that Rulfo was as restless as the city-dwellers he photographed; constantly clambering onto static carriages or crouching on the ground by the rail lines. This motion blur effect is most pronounced in a photograph taken at Calle de la Santa Veracruz in Colonia Guerrero, where the figure of a man who

⁹⁸ Rulfo’s work as a migration officer in both Mexico City and Guadalajara in the 1940s and later as a travelling salesman for Goodrich Euzkadi can partially explain his literary and photographic interest in the theme of human migration. He also recalled a period in 1940 ‘cuando anduve en la vagancia recorriendo el país’. Quoted in Vital Díaz, *Noticias sobre Juan Rulfo*, 59.

has just run across the junction is barely perceptible as he slips out of the visual field on the left hand side (fig.2.24). Dramatically blurred by his rapid movement, his body resists both visual definition and containment within the frame of the photograph.

The vague and fleeting human forms captured in these photographs recall the manner in which spectral figures move through the village of Comala where a ‘gentío de ánimas [...] andan sueltas por la calle’ (204). Like the phantasmal nomads of *PP* or the wandering campesinos of *El Llano en llamas*, these shrouded figures are ever in transit, slipping between the tracks or other gaps in the built environment. This interstitial positioning of the body is significant in the context of Pani’s plans for a structurally totalised urban landscape. As Dreyfus and Rabinow note, if the panoptic strategies of control outlined by Foucault are to function, space ‘must be ordered; there should be no waste, no gaps, no free margins; nothing should escape’.⁹⁹ In Rulfo’s photographs, however, it is precisely these gaps in the built environment that his subjects appear to seek out.¹⁰⁰ In the previously examined photographs of human activity around the railway crossings, for example, figures appear to insert themselves in the gaps between the individual steel rails.

Rulfo also detects interstitial activity within the more concealed crevices of the built environment. In a photograph taken at Tacuba, a man and a woman move along the confined passageway between a line of tank cars and a dilapidated adjacent building (fig.2.25). Hemmed in by the train barriers on one side and a crumbling wall on the other, they nimbly navigate their way between the piles of rubble and wire obstructing their path. In another at Tacuba station, a man walks towards the camera between an illuminated box car and the wall of the station building (fig.2.26), a compositional structure that is

⁹⁹ Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 154.

¹⁰⁰ Erica Segre also briefly notes this focus on the ‘interstice’ in Rulfo’s urban photography. Segre, *Intersected Identities*, 135.

replicated in several other photographs of rail workers and children standing between halted carriages and derelict station buildings (figs.2.27-2.28). Due to Rulfo's careful use of framing and manipulation of light in these photographs, his human subjects not only slip between built spaces but also between darkness and light, at times becoming almost entirely consumed by the shadows.

While Rulfo's panoramic images of the new terminal and the city's skyline are bathed in a sterile white light that stresses the formal rigidity and cleanliness of the urban landscape, these ground level shots dwell on the crepuscular spaces and bodies located at the margins of the tracks.¹⁰¹ In its preoccupation with the shadowy recesses of the rail yards, Rulfo's photographic aesthetic opposes the principles of luminosity and visibility that defined functionalist design. As light-deficiency and poor ventilation were among the main causes of health problems in Mexico City during the industrialising 'miracle' years, Pani stressed the importance of natural illumination as one of the 'felicidades básicas' of public architecture. By replicating Le Corbusier's grid format for the Conjunto Urbano, Pani exploited the hygienic and morally cleansing connotations of natural light, but also used transparency as a strategy for behavioural reform by including expanses of window that enhanced the external visibility of its inhabitants. Pani's article, accompanied by several black-and-white photographs of indistinct figures inhabiting shanty huts and dank tenements, convey a profound phobia of those bodies lurking in the unchartered corners of the capital. Pani refers to Plaza de Romita in Colonia Roma as a 'nidero de ladrones, de borrachines, de mujeronas obesas y sucias [...] en todos sus rincones se acumulan

¹⁰¹ Millán claims that Rulfo took his photographs of the new installations at noon to ensure maximum luminosity. Paulina Millán, "Juan Rulfo entre vías y trenes", in Juan Rulfo, *En los ferrocarriles: Juan Rulfo: fotografías*, 32.

desperdicios’, and warns that the existing low-rent housing blocks are ‘oscuros, estrechos, reinos del chisme y del pleito’.¹⁰²

Several of Rulfo’s photographs seem to intentionally play on this anxiety surrounding the visibility of urban spaces and bodies by exploring human activity in the concealed enclaves of the rail yards and their environs. In a photograph taken in Colonia Guerrero, Rulfo captures two women standing at the foot of a stairway in a dimly lit courtyard of a tenement basement (fig.2.29). Clothes hanging loosely from an overhead washing line provide a phantasmal correlative to the photograph’s human subjects. While our gaze is initially drawn to these two figures positioned to the centre of the patio, previously undetected bodies gradually materialise from the surrounding space as we continue to strain our eyes. A third female figure, partially obscured by the clothes, can be seen descending the stairs and the outline of a fourth can just be glimpsed behind the woman standing by the sink. Behind the two girls seated to the right of the stairway, the nebulous figures of two other children can also be discerned further along the corridor. Unsettling Pani’s panoptic strategies of control, the timing and angle of this photograph accentuates the ambiguity of urban bodies and spaces that stubbornly resist total visualisation.

This concern with the indeterminate is further suggested by Rulfo’s sustained focus on the informal spaces inhabited by these figures. In photographs of women and children huddled beside makeshift dwellings at the margins of the Tlatelolco tracks and children sitting amidst shanty huts in the Tacuba rail yard (fig.2.30), Rulfo directs our gaze to the everyday human narratives unfolding in the irregular spaces Pani deemed a threat to the spatial order of the city. By 1955 the Departamento del Distrito Federal had demanded the abolition of all *asentamientos irregulares* and the systematic eviction of squatters to

¹⁰² Pani, “Penicilina para la ciudad”, 311-312.

maximise spatial efficiency. Commonly referred to as ‘wastelands’, ‘dead zones’ and ‘urban voids’, derelict urban interstices such as alleys, underpasses and abandoned railway yards have historically been considered evidence of the failure of urban development as they obstruct the structural totality and utility of the modern city.¹⁰³ More recently, however, urban theorists such as Andrea Mubi Brighenti have pointed to the politically active nature of these seemingly functionless non-spaces by suggesting that ‘interstitial territorialities can only be appreciated by taking into account the dynamics of power and resistance, of fluidity and boundedness, of mobilities and moorings, of smoothness and striatedness that occur in the contemporary city’.¹⁰⁴

Brighenti’s understanding of interstices as porous or ‘loose’ zones in the urban environment suggests links with the medical term ‘interstitium’, referring to the fluid-filled gaps located between the functional parts of a tissue or organ that facilitate the transit of proteins and nutrients. Considered in the context of the biological analogies popularised by urban theorists like Le Corbusier, urban interstices can thus be understood as unfixed zones connecting the city’s ‘functional’ components. Recalling the porous architectural environment of Comala, which presents Preciado with a ‘multitud de caminos’, Brighenti identifies the interstice’s unfixity as the source of its potentiality, asserting that ‘understanding interstitiality as porosity – literally, “possibility of ways” – may therefore suggest an approach to the city that stresses the many spatial modes in which a plurality of social differences associate’.¹⁰⁵ By lingering on these ambiguous zones in the urban landscape, Rulfo’s urban vision destabilises the functionalist anatomical analogy of the tightly regulated organism and instead evokes the biological concept of the ‘interstitium’

¹⁰³ Gil M. Doron, “The Dead Zone and the Architecture of Transgression”, *City* 4, no. 2 (2000): 247.

¹⁰⁴ Andrea Mubi Brighenti, introduction to *Urban Interstices: The Aesthetics and the Politics of the In-Between*, ed. Andrea Mubi Brighenti (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2013) xvi.

¹⁰⁵ Brighenti, introduction to *Urban Interstices*, xix.

as a flexible space of movement and fluid exchange within the urban body. While the forms of urban navigation explored in these photographs serve little purpose as real political strategies for their ultimately disenfranchised subjects, they open up spaces in the functionalist landscape where a productive critique of these disciplinary urban practices can take place.

Rulfo's visual documentation of the capital during this phase of mid-century urban restructuring reflects his broader artistic and academic interest in Mexico's built landscape. Alongside his literary descriptions of ruins in *PP* and the short stories "Luvina" and "El día del derrumbe", Rulfo composed approximately 400 texts of varying length on Mexican buildings and archaeological sites and photographically traced the evolution of the country's architecture from its Mayan pyramids and sixteenth-century buildings to the sky-scrapers of the Paseo de la Reforma.¹⁰⁶ Like his written commentaries, which according to González Boixo, 'ratifican su interés por relacionar los edificios con el proceso histórico', Víctor Jiménez asserts:

Hay en sus fotos sobre la arquitectura mexicana una relación, igualmente, con la que fue una de sus pasiones: la historia de México; es decir el conocimiento de su gente, su territorio y aquellos testimonios que la actividad de los hombres ha dejado en nuestro suelo a lo largo de los siglos.¹⁰⁷

As suggested by the recurring focus on pre-colonial and colonial ruins in both his textual and photographic documentation of Mexican architecture, Rulfo viewed Mexico's history as an ongoing cycle of oppression:

Yo creo que si hay un constante en la historia de México, esa constante, a partir de la Conquista, está caracterizada por una lucha de los pocos contra los muchos, por una

¹⁰⁶ Víctor Jiménez, "Juan Rulfo: Literatura, fotografía e historia", in *Juan Rulfo: Letras e imágenes*, 22.

Due to limitations of space, it is not possible to discuss Rulfo's architectural writings in detail here.

¹⁰⁷ José Carlos González Boixo, "Esteticismo y clasismo", in *Tríptico para Juan Rulfo: poesía, fotografía, crítica*, eds. Víctor Jiménez et al. (Mexico City: Editorial RM, 2006), 277; Víctor Jiménez, introduction to Juan Rulfo, *Arquitectura de México: fotografías de Juan Rulfo* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1994), 1.

guerra contra el pueblo. De aquí la espantosa desigualdad que no ha podido ser resuelta.¹⁰⁸

In his photographs of the soon-to-be demolished rail yards, Rulfo again looks to the ruin to reflect on Mexico's more recent historical trajectory during a phase of increasing state authoritarianism. The industrial aesthetic of Pani's Conjunto Urbano and its spatially restrictive design encapsulated the shifting values of the post-revolutionary state as it resurrected the Porfirian ideals of 'orden y progreso'. The derelict spaces it would replace had once functioned as key industrial centres during the Díaz era, when the locomotive was established as the symbol *par excellence* of material progress. In the late nineteenth century, the new railway lines became the veins and arteries of the 'vasto organismo federal', bringing cohesion and industrial connectivity to the capital.¹⁰⁹ In his photographs, taken at the height of the industrialising years of the 'miracle', Rulfo's camera gaze resembles that of Benjamin's angel of history, who looks back upon the ruinous landscape as it is swept away by the storm of progress.¹¹⁰ Rather than foreground the terminal and the capital's other new concrete monuments to progress, his lens lingers on these remnants of Porfirian modernity in a way that provokes critical reflection on Mexico's relentless quest for national renovation.

Alongside his splintered narratives, Rulfo's photographic fascination with the urban ruin fits within a broader aesthetic impulse towards fragmentation. Anthropologist Néstor García Canclini identifies the fragmentary form of photography as the ideal medium for documenting urban modernity in Latin America:

¹⁰⁸ Juan Rulfo, "Juan Rulfo y Fernando Benítez hablan sobre los indios", interview by Fernando Benítez, *México Indígena* (December, 1978): 260.

¹⁰⁹ Justo Sierra, "Respuesta del presidente del congreso, Lic. Justo Sierra", in *Informes y manifestos de los poderes ejecutivo y legislativo de 1821 a 1904*, ed. José A. Castellón (Mexico: Imprenta del Gobierno Federal, 1905), 479.

¹¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), 249.

las fotografías, con su captación de instantes aislados, con los enormes espacios virtuales que dejan entre una imagen y otra, parecen representar mejor que el cine las percepciones y los saberes fragmentados que se obtienen de una gran ciudad. Hay una correspondencia entre las operaciones de recorte y encuadre que hacen las fotos y el conjunto de experiencias desarticuladas que se obtienen en una megaciudad.¹¹¹

In highlighting the disjointed quality of photographic representation García Canclini echoes Sontag's assertion that, 'through photographs the world becomes a series of unrelated freestanding particles [...] it is a view of the world which denies interconnectedness, continuity which confers on each moment the character of a mystery'.¹¹² Rulfo alludes to this fragmentary quality of the photographic image in one of the most memorable opening images of the novel, in which Juan contemplates the disintegrating portrait of his mother Dolores (196). This ekphrastic moment which launches Preciado's fragmented narrative journey in *PP* points to a broader concern with the incomplete or fragmented aesthetic object that defines the Jaliscan's artistic corpus.

Rulfo's literary and visual fragments and Rivera's monumental concrete murals provide potent artistic metaphors for the intellectual climates of their respective periods. Through their treatment of bodies and built spaces, the works of these two artists can be seen to map the erection and deconstruction of the very social architecture that defined Mexico in the formative decades following the revolution. Writing in 1925, at the height of the state's nation-building initiatives, Rivera stated that his painterly aim was to express the 'sentido arquitectónico y constructivo' that he perceived at the heart of all creative activity.¹¹³ The architectonic bodies and regimented visual spaces configured by the muralist in the 1920s and 1930s reflect the real efforts of the state's social engineering and public architectural

¹¹¹ Néstor García Canclini, *La ciudad de los viajeros: travesías e imaginarios urbanos, México, 1940-2000* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 1996), 109.

¹¹² Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 23.

¹¹³ Rivera, "De la libreta de apuntes de un pintor mexicano", 73.

projects to construct a stable and rational post-revolutionary society. Forged during the interrogative intellectual climate of the 1950s, Rulfo's literary and photographic works propose an alternative post-revolutionary aesthetic defined by ruination and fragmentation. While scholars have tended to focus exclusively on the 'marginality' of Rulfo's characters, these literary and photographic instances see them also adopt a liminal or interstitial position that metaphorically liberates them from all forms of societal structure. Rather than signal an irrevocably hopeless societal vision, bodily and architectural unbuilding in Rulfo can be read as constructive processes that challenge the structural boundaries of the imagined post-revolutionary community envisioned by Rivera and stimulate speculation about its potential renovation.

Chapter Three

Bodily Articulations of Progress:

(Re)productive Citizenship and the National Development Programme

Located in the stairway of the Pacific Stock Exchange Club in San Francisco, Rivera's *Allegory of California* (1932) (fig.3.1), projects the monumental glowing body of the American tennis champion Helen Wills Moody against a densely packed industrial factoryscape. This vast female figure embodying the abundance of California's natural landscape is populated by industrious male engineers and inventors wielding emblems of scientific and technological innovation. With one hand the personified state holds forth her ripened fruits, while the other reveals her subsoil to labouring miners, who employ a phallic mechanical drill to extract its natural resources. By enforcing the long-standing gendered oppositions linking man with culture and chronological progress, and woman with nature and space, the mural's gendered imagery offers a foundational visual narrative for a prosperous capitalist society. Although executed in the United States, Rivera's vision of the technologised worker productively penetrating the fertile feminine landscape metaphorically articulates the models of productive citizenship that were assigned to male and female bodies as part of the post-revolutionary Mexican state's national development programme during the 1920s and 1930s.

As I outlined in Chapter Two, in the decades following the armed conflict the Mexican state posited a revolutionary societal vision that paradoxically reinforced the Porfirian ideals of 'orden y progreso'. Following on from my discussion of the corporeal dimensions of the post-revolutionary 'return to order' in the previous chapter, I here explore how the ideals of progress and productivity were projected onto both real and imaginary post-revolutionary

bodies after 1920. During the initial post-revolutionary decades, the government's programme of economic development became intertwined with a parallel campaign of corporeal *desarrollismo* that sought to maximise the economic utility of citizens' bodies. Although the developmentalist state was not consolidated until the Cárdenas administration, this earlier period saw the implementation of a gendered framework of (re)productive citizenship that sought to transform men into efficient workers and women into prolific mothers.

The conventional gendered dichotomy established in *Allegory of California*, linking man with chronological progress and woman with space, provides a framework for my readings of the (re)productive male and female bodies presented in Rivera's and Rulfo's works. The second section of this chapter will explore both artists' spatial configuration of the female body in the context of the restrictive reproductive models of female citizenship that were promoted by the post-revolutionary state and its affiliated intellectuals to secure the nation's future prosperity. Before moving on to this analysis, the first section examines Rivera's murals at the SEP (1923-1928) and the Detroit Institute of Arts (1932-1933) alongside Rulfo's mid-century short stories "Macario" and "El hombre" to chart the gradual breakdown of the technologised male body as an expression of national progress. Art historian Hal Foster argues that twentieth-century modernist figurations of the machine can be mapped according to 'the double logic of prosthesis', which implies a 'paradoxical view of technology as both extension and constriction of the body'.¹ Foster explains that, while techno-enthusiast groups such as the Soviet constructivists interpreted the machine within 'a communist system of relations, as an *extension* of the body', this was subsequently rejected by artists associated with the Surrealist and Dadaist movements, who portrayed the technologised subject as 'autistic' or as a broken

¹ Hal Foster, *Prosthetic Gods* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2004), 109.

automaton.² These models are useful for understanding Rivera's and Rulfo's visual and textual machine aesthetics, which reflect shifting cultural perspectives on post-revolutionary *desarrollismo* by conceptualising the technologised male body in terms of corporeal enhancement or cognitive and perceptual dysfunction. From the 1920s to the 1950s, the initial unbridled enthusiasm for technological progress gradually gave way to intellectual reassessment of the cost of capitalist development, as the realities of industrialisation began to be felt. Moving from Rivera's constructivist-inspired images of an enhanceable labouring subject to Rulfo's use of visual technologies to articulate sensory crisis, I explore how the body functions in these works as a site for articulating contemporary aspirations or anxieties regarding the societal and human implications of industrialisation.

In my discussion of the Detroit cycle, I demonstrate how the body of the male worker constitutes a locus for Rivera's conflicting political agendas in the early 1930s, articulating both the fantasy of a dynamic proletarian subject and the Taylorist ideal of a regimented labouring body attuned to the demands of capitalist production. Applying Benjamin's concept of shock, I then explore how Rulfo's texts incorporate cinematic and photographic modes of perception to convey the lived sensory experiences of industrial modernity. Before beginning my analysis of these works, I briefly outline how the ideal of an efficient labouring subject was culturally constructed in Mexico in the 1920s and 1930s.

Part I: Attuning the Male Body to the Rhythms of Industrial Modernity

The discourses of bodily developmentalism that evolved in Mexico during the 1920s and 1930s can again be illuminated by Foucault's theorisation of anatomo-politics as a disciplinary

² Foster, *Prosthetic Gods*, 113.

technology that conceptualises ‘the body as a machine’ and concentrates on ‘the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls’.³ For Foucault, the docile body is defined by its adaptability and receptiveness to improvement: it is ‘pliable’, capable of being ‘manipulated, shaped, trained’.⁴ This fantasy of corporeal improvement was integral to Vasconcelos’s vision of the implicitly male mestizo as a ‘puente hacia el futuro’.⁵ Despite outwardly rejecting positivism, Vasconcelos perceived science, as Villegas notes, as ‘(el) tránsito de salvación, como la revivencia del universo entero’, and *La raza cósmica* can be seen as an attempt to reconcile metaphysics and science in his theorisation of racial improvement.⁶ The link between racial and technological progress in this utopian text is made explicit through his futuristic description of Universopolis, the imaginary mechanised capital city of the continent’s cosmic fifth race. In line with what Foucault would later theorise as the docile body, an entity that can be ‘subjected, used, transformed and improved’, Vasconcelos describes the mestizo’s capacity for constant physiological adaptation due to his ‘maleabilidad, comprensión rápida y emoción fácil’.⁷ Although here Vasconcelos is once again projecting the mixed-race subject as the imagined embodiment of the post-revolutionary nation, his emphasis on the mestizo’s capacity for constant development can be directly related to real state-led initiatives of the 1920s and early 1930s that sought to enhance the economic utility of Mexican citizens by attuning their bodies and behaviours to the rhythms of industrial modernity.

³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol.1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 139.

⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Allen Lane, 1995), 136.

⁵ Vasconcelos, “El evangelio del mestizo”, 88; Gamio, *Forjando patria*, 140.

⁶ Abelardo Villegas, *La filosofía de lo mexicano* (Mexico City: FCE, 1960), 83.

⁷ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 316; Vasconcelos, *La raza cósmica*, 37.

A key aspect of this campaign of corporeal *desarrollismo* was the introduction of a nationwide physical education programme that would enable citizens to fulfil a productive role within a system of capitalist production. As Dafne Cruz Porchini writes:

La frase *mens sana in corpore sano* aludía al hombre nuevo y vigoroso encargado de conducir a la sociedad hacia un futuro ideal [...]. Si el *nuevo* hombre-ciudadano tenía un buen desempeño físico, su potencial laboral-productivo aumentaría en forma notable, fuera en un contexto urbano o rural.⁸

This emerging post-revolutionary physical culture was showcased through highly choreographed athletics and gymnastics displays at the Estadio Nacional in the capital and the Xalapa stadium in Veracruz in the 1920s.⁹ In a poem celebrating the inauguration of the Xalapa stadium, *estridentista* writer Luis Quintanilla recreates the euphoric spectacle of 80,000 ‘cuerpos elásticos’ moving with ‘piernas dinámicas’ and ‘muslos tendidos’.¹⁰ These demonstrations of collective agility were in keeping with contemporary eugenics discourses that linked individual fitness and efficiency with that of the wider body politic. Writing in the medical journal *Medicina* in 1926, Dr. José Zozaya, Director of the Instituto de Higiene, stressed that ‘la eficacia de una nación, depende de la eficacia de cada uno de los individuos que forman parte de ella’.¹¹ Smaller-scale precision drills were integrated into physical education in schools, which promoted productivity as a key civic virtue through the implementation of task-based pedagogical strategies.¹² Developmentalism began in earnest

⁸ Dafne Cruz Porchini, *Formando el cuerpo de una nación: el imaginario del deporte en el México posrevolucionario (1920-1940)* (Mexico City: INBA, 2012), 33.

⁹ Mónica Lizbeth Chávez González highlights the gendered choreographical dimensions of these mass displays: ‘En el caso de la participación femenina, el afán estético de sus movimientos corporales y sus atuendos deportivos contrastaba con las lecciones de fuerza y vigor que presentaban los varones’. Mónica Lizbeth Chávez González, “Construcción de la nación y el género desde el cuerpo: La educación física en el México posrevolucionario”, *Desacatos* 30 (2009), 46.

¹⁰ Luis Quintanilla, “Estadio”, *El Universal Ilustrado*, October 28, 1926, 40.

¹¹ José Zozaya, “Higiene Mental”, *Medicina, Revista Científica Mensual* 6, no. 68 (1926): 208.

¹² José Manuel Puig Casauranc, “La educación integral”, *Boletín de la Secretaría de Educación Pública* 5, no. 7 (1925): 75.

that decade under Cárdenas, who situated the state's economic programme within a narrative of revolutionary progress:

La revolución no quiere que se pierda el tiempo sino que quiere que los hombres de hoy cambien el criterio para que con un nuevo sentido de su responsabilidad vengan a participar en el movimiento económico que la República busca a favor de sí misma.¹³

This sense of urgency was reflected in the implementation of a new national calendar that extended state control over the time-management of industrial workers. Leticia González del Rivero's description highlights the Fordist dimensions of its structure, which established clear divisions between work and leisure to maximise productivity and minimise fatigue:

Se intentó una modernización de la sociedad, en la que las fuerzas productivas debían organizar el calendario de la vida cotidiana de acuerdo con el ritmo propuesto por el Estado y la nueva organización del proyecto social e industrial que pretendía emprender. Se debía administrar el tiempo, con una clara división del "trabajo" y de la "vida", bajo la premisa de que sin disciplinar el tiempo no se podía tener la insistente energía del hombre industrial.¹⁴

This desire to adjust the lives of workers to the 'rhythms' of the developmentalist state reveals the extent to which, by the early 1930s, the government had come to view the worker's body as a mechanical unit in need of regulation to achieve maximum efficiency.

Technological and Corporeal Progress in Rivera's SEP and Detroit Cycles

Although industrialisation advanced slowly during the 1920s, artists embraced the machine as an emblem of national progress.¹⁵ In 1921 Siqueiros called for the creation of a new industrial

¹³ Lázaro Cárdenas, "Discurso del candidato del PNR a la presidencia de la República" in *Palabras y documentos públicos de Lázaro Cárdenas: 1928-1970*, 122.

¹⁴ Leticia González del Rivero, "Tiempo de la iglesia versus tiempo del estado: México en la década de los treinta", in *Un Haz de reflexiones en torno al tiempo, la historia y la modernidad*, ed. María Dolores Illescas Nájera (Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana, 1995), 197.

¹⁵ Rubén Gallo, *Mexican Modernity: The Avant-garde and the Technological Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT, 2005), 21-22.

visual aesthetic, urging Latin American artists to celebrate the ‘máquina moderna’ and its capacity to generate ‘emociones plásticas inesperadas’.¹⁶ In Mexico, his call was most enthusiastically answered by the literary and visual practitioners of the *estridentista* movement, led by Manuel Maples Arce, whose avant-garde aesthetic coupled an enthusiasm for the sensory dynamism of industrial urbanity with a Bolshevik concept of revolution. Rivera was drawn to the techno-enthusiasm of the *estridentistas* and contributed several illustrations and calligrams to their magazines *Horizonte* and *Irradiador* in the early 1920s. Although Siqueiros was the first to call for a technologised pictorial aesthetic, it was Rivera who most comprehensively explored the utopian possibilities of the machine, producing murals that interlinked technological advancement with societal and physiological progress. The notion of malleability, common to Foucault’s conception of the docile machine-body and Vasconcelos’s definition of the mestizo, can shed light on the evolution of Rivera’s corporeal imagery in the SEP and Detroit Institute fresco cycles, which illustrates the increasing mobility, dynamism and precision of the body as it adapts to the rhythms of mechanised labour.

The SEP panels represent an important departure in Rivera’s early mural production as they are the first works to incorporate motifs of labour and technology – themes that would come to define his visual aesthetic throughout the 1930s. While much of the cycle thematically takes its cue from nineteenth-century works such as Juan Cordero’s positivist-inspired allegorical mural *El triunfo de la ciencia y el trabajo sobre la envidia y la ignorancia* (1874) at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, Rivera accentuates the corporeal dimensions of post-revolutionary developmentalism by exploiting the visual and spatial dimensions of his medium to mobilise both the painted body and the physical body of the observer. *La mecanización del*

¹⁶ Siqueiros, “Tres llamamientos de orientación actual a los pintores y escultores”, 2.

campo (1926), an extended fresco sweeping up the main stairway of the SEP, provides a stunning visual manifesto of the artist's early technological utopianism. By ascending the steep staircase, the viewer sets in motion a visual narrative of the gradual electrification of the Mexican landscape, achieving, according to Rivera, 'una visión simbólica del progreso del hombre'.¹⁷ This vision of human progress is communicated in fundamentally corporeal terms in Rivera's visual eulogy to labour in the *Patio del Trabajo* on the first floor, where he diverges from the hieratic figures of *Creación* and introduces a range of dynamic new postures. In *El Trapiche* (1923) (fig.3.2), the stirring motion of the sugar mill workers synchronises with the circular movement of the waterwheel positioned in the background, while the elongated dancierly figures of the foundry workers sway back and forth in a steady pendular motion in *La Fundición* (1924) (fig.3.3). While these panels bear iconographic similarities to contemporary images by Agustín Lazo and Ramón Alva de la Canal that glorified the graceful agility of the worker, Rivera's spatially dynamic works mark a profound innovation by extending these corporeal ideals to the material bodies of the observers engaging with them. As the architectural distribution of the SEP panels prompts us to crane our necks and constantly reposition ourselves around pillars, the cycle demands the engagement of an exclusively mobile and able-bodied viewing subject.

The industrial images of the SEP offer the first outlines of a malleable labouring body that Rivera would fully develop in his Detroit Institute frescoes the following decade. Rivera's proposal for the Detroit programme was approved in 1931 by Edsel B. Ford, chair of the Arts Commission of the City and he moved to the 'Motor City' with Kahlo the following year. Located in the naturally illuminated Garden Court of the Institute, the cycle offers an

¹⁷ Rivera, *Mi arte, mi vida*, 107.

exhaustive visual account of Detroit's recent scientific and technological developments. Smaller panels depicting advancements in the areas of pharmaceuticals, aeronautics and chemistry frame the two principal murals portraying the construction process for the Ford V-8 model. Through a series of interconnected episodes, the 800-square-foot central panels on the north (fig.3.4) and south walls (fig.3.5) respectively depict the manufacturing of the engine and the assembly of the car's body. Fusing the labour-centred imagery of the *Patio del Trabajo* panels and *The Making* with a more advanced industrial visual vocabulary, these monumental scenes of activity within the Ford River Rouge Plant offer a utopian vision of the combined power of human and mechanical labour. By depriving these compositions of a singular point of focus, Rivera intentionally provokes a restlessness in the observing eye that animates the figures across the entire pictorial field.

The remarkable human vitality of these scenes was, however, dramatically at odds with the grim contemporary reality of the factory. While both frescoes accentuate the collective energy of the city's robust labour force, Rivera had in fact arrived at the peak of the Great Depression and just weeks after a communist-organised hunger strike of 3000 Rouge Plant workers. As Rubén Gallo notes, the muralist based his sketches on photographs taken by W.J. Stettler, but dramatically increased the number of bodies in his painted reproductions to erase all trace of the devastating unemployment crisis.¹⁸ Rivera had reaffirmed his commitment to communism in 1932 and, as Anthony Lee convincingly suggests, the muralist's emphasis on the imagined collective might of the workforce may have been an attempt to sidestep the obvious ideological contradictions of his apparent homage to capitalist industry.¹⁹

¹⁸ Gallo, *Mexican Modernity*, 15.

¹⁹ Diego Rivera, "The Revolutionary Spirit in Modern Art", *Modern Quarterly* 6, no.3 (1932): 51-57; Anthony W. Lee, "Workers and Painters: Social Realism and Race in Diego Rivera's Detroit Murals", in *The Social and*

Despite this compensatory strategy, Rivera's collaboration with one of America's most powerful capitalists, and his remarkably inaccurate interpretation of conditions in the Rouge Plant, inevitably provoked accusations of ideological inconsistency from artists affiliated with the PCM. In a damning article entitled "Rivera's Counter-Revolutionary Road" (1934), Siqueiros criticised Rivera's 'ideologically obscure' Detroit cycle for its failure to address the injustices suffered by the proletariat.²⁰ The politically precarious position in which Rivera found himself in the early 1930s is reflected in his works of this period. While his portable panels for the MoMA exhibition (1931) and mural *Portrait of America* (1933) criticise capitalist corruption, the Detroit cycle, like *The Making*, projects an unmistakably optimistic vision of industrial progress. These contrasting images reflect Rivera's struggle to reconcile his admiration of the scale and sophistication of US industrial production with his status as a revolutionary artist. In Detroit, the body of the male worker embodies these conflicting political agendas, articulating both the fantasy of a dynamic proletarian subject and the Taylorist ideal of a regulated working body.

The ideological tensions at the heart of Rivera's utopian vision of the Rouge Plant can be traced back to his earlier engagement with the techno-enthusiast artists associated with the Russian constructivist movement. Rivera travelled to the USSR in 1927 as part of the official delegation of the PCM to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution. The following year he joined the *October (Oktyabr')* group, a visual arts collective formed of several former constructivist artists including El Lissitzky, Alexander Rodchenko and Aleksei Gan. Like Mexico, the Soviet Union was, according to Foster, 'more advanced in the

the Real: Political Art of the 1930s in the Western Hemisphere, eds. Alejandro Anreus et al. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 206.

²⁰ Siqueiros, "Rivera's Counter-Revolutionary Road", 19.

representation of industry than its implementation' in the early twentieth century.²¹ Despite lagging productivity in the early years of the Soviet Union, Tim Harte describes how these artists looked to technology as the basis for 'a faster, more receptive human mind and body; a proletarian, Marxist consciousness for the new era; and a more efficient society'.²² This corporeal utilitarianism was partly inspired by the theories of scientific management that had been devised by Frederick Winslow Taylor at the beginning of the century. Modelling human functionality on that of the machine, Taylorism sought to maximise efficiency along the assembly line by assigning specific tasks to individual workers and streamlining their movements to eliminate all superfluous gestures. Fascinated by the capacity of the technologised environment to forge a more dynamic and efficient labouring body, the constructivists looked to the factory as a 'university for the new Socialist man'.²³ With the implementation of Stalin's first Five-Year Plan in 1928, the constructivists' avant-garde abstractionism was gradually replaced with a more robust visual idiom. While official propaganda maintained the dynamic angles and accelerated movements of constructivist iconography, it emphasised the vigour and muscularity of the hero-worker.

Although Rivera only remained in Moscow for eight months, this Soviet fantasy of an enhanced industrialised corporeality exerted a significant influence on his mural imagery of the early 1930s. While some critics have read the Detroit cycle as a commentary on the dehumanising effects of societal mechanisation, Rivera's description of the programme clearly

²¹ Foster, *Prosthetic Gods*, 113.

²² Timothy Harte, *Fast Forward: The Aesthetics and Ideology of Speed in Russian Avant-Garde Culture, 1910-1930* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 156-157.

²³ El Lissitzky, *Russia: An Architecture for World Revolution*, trans. Eric Dluhosch (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1970), 57-58.

aligns with the constructivists' interpretation of technology as a liberating force for the proletarian worker:

Mi pasión juvenil por los juguetes mecánicos se ha transformado en deleite ante la maquinaria por la maquinaria en sí y por lo que significa para el hombre: su superación y liberación del trabajo degradante y de la pobreza. Por eso he colocado al héroe colectivo, hombre-máquina, en el lugar superior al de los héroes tradicionales del arte y la leyenda.²⁴

In Detroit Rivera constructs this heroic 'hombre-máquina' by combining the technophilic imagery of the constructivists with the robust corporeality of socialist realism. The constructivists' interpretation of the machine as a prosthetic augmentation of the body is conveyed in a highly literal sense on the south and north walls of Rivera's cycle, where the bodies of the workers are extended through their engagement with the surrounding machinery. To the very centre of the south wall, a worker leans forward with his back leg raised off the ground (fig.3.6) in a posture reminiscent of early constructivist configurations of the industrial body such as El Lissitzky's *New Man* (1923) (fig.3.7). In Rivera's image, it is the worker's physical contact with the piston cylinder and the overhead wire that elongates his body, pulling it forward into space. This capacity of technology to literally extend the body is again illustrated to the right of this figure where a worker dressed in dark overalls wields an electric saw (fig.3.8). Here the beams of light generated by the saw radiate directly from the body in a manner reminiscent of the 'force lines' invented by Rodchenko and later adopted by the futurists to represent 'an invisible extension of the essence of objects, projected beyond their material finitude'.²⁵ By positioning this mechanical apparatus over the worker's groin, Rivera reinforces the concept of the machine as a bodily appendage while also emphasising the virility of the male industrial worker.

²⁴ Rivera, *Mi arte, mi vida* 143.

²⁵ Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and the Technological Imagination* (New York: Rodopi, 2009), 50.

Taylorist organisation strategies had been in operation in the Detroit plant since 1913 and the disciplinary aspects of these theories come into sharper focus on the north wall, where Rivera aligns the body's movements to the repetitive rhythms of the factory. The artist recalled how his visit to Detroit had rekindled a childhood interest in the interrelation between human and mechanical mobility:

Más que todo me gustaban las máquinas, las armas, los animales y, por supuesto, todos los juguetes mecánicos [...] los hacía funcionar y los desarmaba para ver cómo trabajaban. Después trataba de volverlos a armar [...] Entre los tres y los cinco años me inquietaba la necesidad de saber cómo se mueven los seres humanos y los animales.²⁶

Rivera's fascination with the dynamics of human motion is revealed on the north wall, where he draws inspiration from the serial motion studies developed by Étienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge during the late nineteenth century to analyse the dynamics of human locomotion incrementally (fig.3.9). These chronophotographic sequences, which represented an intermediary stage in the transition from still photography to cinematography, provided the theoretical foundations for Taylorism's reduction of the labouring body to a series of discrete repetitive movements in order to maximise its efficiency. Paintings such as Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 1)* (1911) and Giacomo Balla's *Girl Running on Balcony* (1912) (fig.3.10) reveal how early twentieth-century artists recreated this impression of multiple superimposed exposures to render visible the successive stages of the body's movement. By employing the same time-lapse visual effect in the context of the Rouge plant, Rivera articulates in pictorial terms Taylorism's use of repetition to enhance human efficiency. In the receding lines of identical workers located at various points across the north wall (figs.3.11-3.13), the use of repeated, overlapping forms creates the chronophotographic

²⁶ Diego Rivera, "La obra del pintor Diego Rivera", in *Textos de arte*, 118.

illusion of a single figure moving rapidly through space. This recycling of almost identical bodily forms across the mural further aligns with Taylorist principles of motion economy. As in *The Making*, Rivera distributes the workers according to their respective tasks, but here the movement of the labouring bodies is more meticulously choreographed, with specific gestures assigned to each group. The complementary poses and counter-poses of the workers leaning over a trolley cart to the centre-fore of the mural (fig.3.14), and those assembling engine blocks along the assembly line to the left foreground (fig.3.15) are drawn from the limited repertoire of postures devised by Balla, who modelled human movement on ‘the swing of a pendulum’ and the ‘in and out motion of a piston inside a cylinder’.²⁷ Through this strict regulation and standardisation of human movement, Rivera visually articulates the Taylorist ideal of an anonymous mass-produced man, efficient and interchangeable.

Rivera’s corporeal imagery in Detroit was instrumental in the shift towards a more coherent developmentalist machine-body aesthetic in state-sponsored visual culture in Mexico from the mid-1930s onwards. In the stained-glass piece *Jalando rieves* (1934) (fig.3.16) by the *estridentista* artist Fermín Revueltas, the cover illustrations of workers’ magazines such as *Lux* (1928-1935) (figs.3.17-3.18) and Francisco Eppens Helguera’s postage stamp designs of the 1940s (figs. 3.19), the machine is visualised as an extension of the body or a point of comparison for human mobility. This constellation of images contributed to a virile post-revolutionary visual discourse of the industrial worker, which in contrast to its Soviet equivalent, remained exclusively masculine.²⁸

²⁷ Umberto Boccioni, “Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture”, in *Futurism: An Anthology*, eds. Lawrence S. Rainey and Christine Poggi (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 118.

²⁸ Victoria E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters Under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 75.

In a subtle self-portrait in the upper left-hand side of the north wall, Rivera appears amidst the throng of toiling bodies, surveying the harmonious display of human and mechanical movement unfolding before him. Towards the end of the 1940s, Rulfo would develop an alternative impression of the assembly-line process while occupying a similar vantage point on a factory floor in Mexico City. The writer moved to the capital in 1935 and held a number of positions before securing a job as a factory supervisor with the tyre manufacturers Goodrich Euzkadi in 1947, just as the *alemanista* drive for industrialisation was gaining momentum. In his private letters to his wife Clara Aparicio from this period, the factory emerges as a dystopian world of mechanised capitalist production where ‘el hombre es una máquina y la máquina está considerada como hombre’.²⁹

By the 1940s, Rivera’s American vision of industrialisation had evolved into a Mexican reality, with the automobile industry emerging as a key catalyst for economic growth.³⁰ Moving away from the nation’s traditionally agrarian-based economy, the Camacho administration (1940-1946) shifted to an industrial capitalist model that increased the presence of textile, automotive and cement factories in major cities.³¹ These early years of the ‘miracle’ when Rulfo was living in the capital witnessed the transformation not only of Mexico’s urban spaces but also its media landscapes. The 1940s saw the emergence of the mass media technologies of print, radio, television and cinema, which flourished during the so-called ‘Golden Age’ of film production. While the economic ‘miracle’ brought undeniable prosperity, with gross domestic product tripling between 1940 and 1960, the stagnation of the countryside

²⁹ Rulfo to Clara Aparicio, late February 1947, in *Aire de las colinas: Cartas a Clara*, ed. Alberto Vital Díaz (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2000), 54.

³⁰ Stephen R. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Wilimington, Del: Scholarly Resources, 1999), 25.

³¹ Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer, *In the Shadow of the Mexican Revolution: Contemporary Mexican History, 1910-1989* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 163.

and harsh working conditions exposed the failure of the revolution to bring lasting socio-political change.³²

As *desarrollismo* advanced unevenly, mid-century thinkers interrogated the state's shifting interpretations of revolutionary progress. Following the claim by Daniel Cosío Villegas, a harsh critique of the state's industrialising model, that the revolution had lost its 'impulso motor', essayists such as Zea, José Iturriaga and Antonio Díaz Soto y Gama condemned the social cost of unfettered capitalist development in the late 1940s and early 1950s.³³ Paz formulated a grim Huxleyesque vision of Mexico City in the mid-1950s and questioned contemporary faith in capitalist progress in *El laberinto de la soledad*, condemning the alienating conditions of the factory where 'el obrero pierde, bruscamente [...] toda relación humana y concreta con el mundo: ni son suyos los útiles que emplea, ni es suyo el fruto de su esfuerzo'.³⁴ Following the rhythms dictated by capitalist machinery, he warns, 'la sociedad marcharía con eficacia, pero sin rumbo. Y la repetición del mismo gesto, distintiva de la máquina, llevaría a una forma desconocida de la inmovilidad: la del mecanismo que avanza de ninguna parte hacía ningún lado'.³⁵ In contemporary literary production, Juan José Arreola, a close friend of Rulfo's during his early years in the capital, offered a sceptical antidote to the earlier techno-optimism of the *estridentistas* by highlighting the alienating effects of mechanised modernity in his short story collection *Confabulario* (1952). Visual artists also explored the grim social realities of industrial progress from the mid-1930s onwards, with both Siqueiros and Orozco producing disturbing visual commentaries on capitalist industrialisation.

³² Paul Ganster and David E. Lorey, *The U.S.-Mexican Border Today: Conflict and Cooperation in Historical Perspective* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 89.

³³ Cosío Villegas, "La crisis de México", 42.

³⁴ Sergio Delgado Moya, *Delirious Consumption: Aesthetics and Consumer Capitalism in Mexico and Brazil* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), 122; Paz, *El laberinto de la soledad*, 54.

³⁵ Paz, *El laberinto*, 54.

In Orozco's *La catársis* (1934), the moral collapse of humankind is embodied by an orgiastic mass of bodily and mechanical matter, while Siqueiros's *Retrato de la burguesía* (1939-1940) depicts pylons and industrial chimneys surging up behind a machine that spews out blood and gold coins.

Textual Technologies: Rulfo's Assembly-Line Poetics

Similar concerns regarding the human cost of technological progress resurface throughout Rulfo's letters to Clara, written in Mexico City between 1944 and 1950. Rulfo secured his position as a *capataz* with Goodrich through his uncle Edmundo Phelan, but almost immediately requested to be transferred to the advertising department, where he worked as a travelling salesman until 1952. Rulfo's correspondences reveal that his swift departure was motivated by the dehumanising conditions of the factory. Rulfo's biographer Juan Ascencio recalls how the writer was particularly disturbed by the mechanical automatising of the workers' movements:

Contaba que había una máquina llamada "La Bámbury", que era controlada por un obrero fortachón que sujetaba una especie de manubrio siempre en sacudimiento. Un día hubo apagón. El obrero siguió en sacudidas de sus fuertes brazos como si la máquina no se hubiese detenido. El hombre-máquina hería la sensibilidad de Juan.³⁶

Here, the 'hombre-máquina' so heroically portrayed by Rivera in Detroit has evolved into a tragic figure for whom the internalisation of technological rhythms has resulted in a loss of lived sensation. Echoing the *estridentistas*, whose poetry celebrated technology's amplification of the senses, the muralist had described the internal workings of the factory as

³⁶ Juan Ascencio, *Un extraño en la tierra: biografía no autorizada de Juan Rulfo* (Mexico City: Debate, 2005), 165.

‘una orquesta mecánica (que producía) una maravillosa sinfonía’.³⁷ In his writings to Clara, however, Rulfo stresses the disorienting and numbing effect of this environment:

Lo que quiero es liberarme de esta debilidad de voluntad que se ha hecho cargo de mí desde que comencé a trabajar en esa dichosa fábrica. Créeme, antes sabía a dónde iba, sabía pensar y desarrollar alguna idea [...] Ahora me parece que ando volando. Que tengo los ojos cerrados y que camino a ciegas por todas partes y casi necesito que me lleven de la mano.³⁸

Rulfo’s account of the brutalising impact of the factory carries echoes of Benjamin’s essay “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” (1939), where the latter looks to the assembly-line process as evidence of how technology has subjected ‘the human sensorium to a complex kind of training’ that has profoundly transformed human cognition and perception.³⁹ For Benjamin, the isolated experiences of the industrial worker along the conveyor belt encapsulate the ‘shock’ experience that defines life in the industrial city and modern media such as photography and cinematography. He asserts that this atrophy of experience represents a shift from *Erfahrung*, in which perception, bodily experience and memory are fully integrated, to a disconnected and fragmentary version of experience termed *Erlebnis*.⁴⁰ In an insightful re-reading of Benjamin, Susan Buck-Morss links his discussion of sensory trauma to neurasthenia, a nervous disorder that was originally attributed to the accelerated pace of industrialised urban life in the nineteenth century. Highlighting its links with Benjamin’s *Erlebnis*, she explains how the condition was metaphorically evoked through descriptions of “shattered” nerves, nervous “breakdown”, “going to pieces”, “fragmentation” of the

³⁷ ‘Accesorios de automóviles, refacciones Haynes, llantas, acumuladores y dinamos, chasis, neumáticos, klaxons [...] Se amplían mis sensaciones’. Manuel Maples Arce, “Actual No 1: Hoja de Vanguardia. Comprimido Estridentista”, in *El Estridentismo: México, 1921-1927*, ed. Luis Mario Schneider (Mexico City: UNAM, 1985), 44; Diego Rivera, *Diego Rivera: arte y revolución* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1999), 223.

³⁸ Rulfo to Aparicio, August 21, 1949, 284.

³⁹ Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire”, in *Illuminations*, 177.

⁴⁰ Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire”, 165.

psyche'.⁴¹ Buck-Morss's linking of Benjaminian 'shock' to neurasthenia is significant in light of Rulfo's personal experiences of the city during the early years of the 'miracle'. Writing to Clara in 1946, he recounts how the doctor has prescribed him medication 'para que me acordara de ti, pues según él me sentía yo como desterrado y sin esperanzas. También me encontró muy neurasténico y todo enfermo del hígado'.⁴² Further references to nervous fatigue, poor digestion and depression in his letters, along with other biographical details, lend substance to this diagnosis.⁴³ Amat claims that Rulfo struggled consistently with 'enfermedades nerviosas' after moving to the capital while Antonio Alatorre, who worked alongside Rulfo as a civil servant between 1936 and 1947, recalls that he was often absent due to 'conmoción y choque nervioso'.⁴⁴

Despite his aversion to the industrialised environment, Rulfo maintained a keen interest in technology, particularly the modern visual media that Benjamin associates with the 'shock' of mechanised modernity. As I noted in Chapter Two, Rulfo was a prolific photographer, amassing a collection of over 7,000 negatives, and developed a keen interest in cinematography. He worked as a film censor during the 1940s and 1950s and later delved into the world of script writing, earning credits on films including *El despojo* (1960), *Paloma herida* (1963), *El gallo de oro* (1964) and *La fórmula secreta* (1965). These details complicate the conventional view of Rulfo as a fundamentally rural writer whose literary vision excludes all traces of contemporary modernisation. While these works do appear to portray what Vital

⁴¹ Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered", in *Walter Benjamin: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, ed. Peter Osborne (London: Routledge, 2005), 303.

⁴² Rulfo to Aparicio, January 23, 1946, 39.

⁴³ Neurasthenia was still considered a valid medical condition in mid-century Mexico. See Samuel Ramírez Moreno, "Concepto actual sobre la neurastenia y su patogénesis", *Medicina - Revista Mexicana* no.26 (1940): 563- 580.

⁴⁴ Núria Amat, *Juan Rulfo* (Barcelona: Ediciones Omega, 2003), 107; Antonio Alatorre, "La persona de Juan Rulfo", *Literatura Mexicana* 10, no. 1-2 (1999): 231.

describes as ‘un mundo premoderno, prehistórico’, their aesthetic form is intimately bound to the context of industrialisation and mass technologisation in which they were produced.⁴⁵ By visualising a static rural universe through the perceptual lens of modern visual technologies, Rulfo’s texts aesthetically encapsulate the asynchronous modernisation process that he would have witnessed firsthand while travelling to and from the capital as an itinerant salesman.

One of the only scholars to consider the intersections between Rulfo’s interest in modern visual media and his literary production is Lucy Bell, who examines how ‘photographic presentation is linked with phenomenological purity and present-ness’ in his short stories.⁴⁶ In my reading, however, I focus on how technologised perception is internalised by Rulfo’s characters to evoke the deterioration of lived experience in the industrial environment. The transition from Rivera’s prosthetic conception of the machine as an extension or acceleration of the physical body to technology’s infiltration of human perceptual faculties in Rulfo’s texts reflects Armstrong’s assertion that while avant-garde visual art movements such as constructivism and futurism ‘celebrated the mechanised body or the body attached to the machine’, modernist literature has consistently drawn attention to ‘the limits of the body, either in terms of its mechanical functioning, its energy levels, or its abilities as a perceptual system’.⁴⁷ Making use of literature’s unique capacity to explore the interior life of the body, early modernist writers such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf articulated the sensations of fragmentation, dislocation and alienation produced by industrial modernity through a form of textual experimentation that drew heavily from technologised modes of

⁴⁵ Alberto Vital Díaz, *Palabra clave: géneros inesperados y personajes esenciales de la literatura* (Mexico City: Taurus, 2012), 52.

⁴⁶ Lucy Bell, “Photography, Punctum and Shock: Re-Viewing Juan Rulfo’s Short Stories”, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 91, no.4 (2014): 444.

⁴⁷ Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology, and the Body: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 86, 4.

perception. As I will demonstrate, Rulfo uses technology to similar effect, utilising the perceptual frameworks of photography and cinema to articulate certain anxieties regarding the transformation of human experience within the industrialised environment. Drawing on Benjamin's concept of 'shock', I explore how Rivera's fantasy of a technologised subject attuned to the rhythms of industrial modernity is reconceptualised in Rulfo's short stories "Macario" and "El hombre", where mechanical forms of vision are employed to evoke a breakdown in the body's cognitive or sensory-motor functioning.

In "Macario", Rulfo reproduces the automatic and unmediated nature of photographic registration to convey the perceptual and cognitive limitations of his narrator. While the simplistic language and syntax of the story's opening lines initially suggest the narrative voice of a child, Macario's references to the sexual nature of his relationship with his nurse Felipa suggest he is in fact a young man affected by an intellectual disability.⁴⁸ In contrast to the perspectival plurality that characterises much of Rulfo's literature, the fictional environment of "Macario" is perceived through the singular lens of the story's eponymous first-person narrator. As the story opens, Macario is positioned motionless beside the gutter waiting for the frogs to emerge so he can strike them with a wooden plank (89). This opening passage, which portrays Macario as a kind of static surveillance apparatus, evokes Rulfo's description of photography as an act of aiming and firing to capture the fleeting image. Playing on the dual meanings of the verb *disparar*, Rulfo claimed: 'Yo tenía ojo, cuando veía la foto disparaba. Tenía buena puntería'.⁴⁹ Rulfo's metaphor of photography as rapid-fire and the description of

⁴⁸ Felipa tickles Macario and allows him to drink her breast milk: 'Felipa me hacía cosquillas por todas partes' (91). The fact that Felipa is lactating raises the question of whether she has been impregnated by the narrator. Rulfo later confirmed that Macario was 'un loquito de veintitantos años de edad'. Quoted in Arthur Ramírez, "Style and Technique in Juan Rulfo" (PhD thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1973), 117.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Paulina Millán, "A Journey Through Juan Rulfo's Photographs", in *Rethinking Juan Rulfo's Creative World: Prose, Photography, Film*, eds. Nuala Finnegan and Dylan Brennan (London: Routledge, 2016), 52.

Macario poised to strike the frogs recall Benjamin's identification of the sudden 'snapping' action of the photographer as one of the most powerful instances of 'shock'.⁵⁰ This photographic analogy is maintained in the early part of Macario's monologue, which is formed of a quick succession of vivid but disjointed images of the toads, his godmother's eyes and the hibiscus flower he associates with Felipa's breast milk. Rulfo's rendering of Macario's thought sequence as a series of photographic snap-shots is reinforced by the short, abrupt form of the sentences which imitate the sharp movement of a camera shutter:

Las ranas son verdes de todo a todo, menos en la panza. Los sapos son negros. También los ojos de mi madrina son negros. Las ranas son buenas para hacer de comer con ellas (89).

Like the obsessive view of the camera eye, Macario perceives his surroundings through a restricted lens, fixating on specific details such as the precise colour of the frogs' bellies and the seemingly black eyes of his godmother (89). As these magnified and decontextualised images resist integration into a coherent or purposeful stream of thought, Macario's particular mode of vision, like that of the camera, represents an amplification but also a reduction of human perception. Eliding the distinctions of time, space, cause and effect, Macario registers his reality in a dispassionate manner that is severed from conscious reflection. The narrator's heightened perception of detail and distracted, primarily image-based thought process suggests that he is affected by some form of developmental disorder. Like the ostracised disabled boy of José Revueltas's story "El hijo tonto" (1944), who is dismissed as 'tan tonto, tan inútil', Rulfo's inclusion of a cognitively impaired protagonist is significant in the context of the state's ongoing efforts to produce a progressive and industrious populace.⁵¹ In the eyes of the

⁵⁰ Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire", 176.

⁵¹ José Revueltas, "El hijo tonto", in *Dios en la tierra* (Mexico City: Editorial Novaro, 1973), 105.

modernising state, Macario exemplifies the *niño problema*, a term broadly applied by eugenicists to mentally or physically defective children who posed an obstacle to national development.⁵²

Buck-Morss's contention that the 'motor responses of switching, snapping, the jolt in movement of a machine have their psychic counterpart in the "sectioning of time" into a sequence of repetitive moments without development' establishes a link between the automated reflexes of the assembly-line worker and the automatic exposures of the camera.⁵³ Her description of these mechanical actions as a 'sequence of repetitive moments without development' can be applied to the narrative form of Macario's monologue, in which repetition, integral to the mechanically streamlined Taylorist body, is associated with irrational and inefficient behaviour. Macario states that Felipa's milk 'es dulce como las flores del obelisco' (90) only to subsequently reiterate the same idea: 'muchas veces he comido flores de obelisco para entretener el hambre. Y la leche era de ese sabor' (91). Repetition again results in linguistic inefficiency when he claims 'lo de lavar los trastes a mí me toca. Lo de acarrear leña para prender el fogón también a mí me toca' (89). This relentless recycling of phrases and ideas throughout the text produces a monotonous narrative rhythm that is echoed in the repetitive thud of Macario's hitting against the various surfaces of the house.⁵⁴ A further correlation between bodily and narrative movement can be detected in the link between the text's paralytic form and the arrested cognitive development and physical immobility of its protagonist, who remains 'quietecito' throughout his monologue. Echoing his opening

⁵² Beatriz Urías Horcasitas, *Historias secretas del racismo en México (1920–1950)* (Mexico City: Tusquets, 2007), 142.

⁵³ Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics", 302.

⁵⁴ The comic edge to this image captures what Michael North identifies as the intrinsically mechanical nature of modernist comedy, which played on the body's automated reflexes and repetitions. Michael North, *Machine-Age Comedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5.

statement, Macario affirms in the closing lines that he is still seated ‘junto a la alcantarilla’ (94), revealing a circular narrative structure that negates all possibility of textual progress.

The Rulfian body again imbibes technology in “El hombre”, where mechanised forms of visual representation, this time drawn from cinema, are used to describe a form of perception that is cut off from cognition and lived bodily experience. In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936), Benjamin explains how the cinematic techniques of rapid cuts, close-ups and montage have revealed ‘new structural formations of the subject’.⁵⁵ Elaborating on the corporeal implications of this new visual grammar, he compares the cinematographer to a surgeon who uses the camera to dissect reality into ‘multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law’.⁵⁶ Susan McCabe demonstrates how this dissective capacity of the cinematic lens was harnessed by modernist poets to explore ‘cultural tropes of the fragmented, dissociated corporeality, most notably, the hysteric mechanical body, newly fabricated in modernity’.⁵⁷ In “El hombre”, Rulfo similarly reproduces this cinematic split between the mind and sensate body to enact a form of Taylorist corporeal fragmentation that reduces the male body to a kind of dissociated automaton.

Framed as a tale of double-vengeance, “El hombre” traces the movements of José Alcancía, a fugitive who has recently murdered the family of a man called Urquidi. We later learn that Urquidi was previously responsible for the death of Alcancía’s brother. Although the identities of the two men are initially obscured by the presence of three overlapping narrative voices, it becomes apparent that Urquidi is tracking Alcancía as he flees across the countryside. We learn that Alcancía committed the crime in a state of semi-consciousness; he opened the

⁵⁵ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, in *Illuminations*, 238.

⁵⁶ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, 236.

⁵⁷ Susan McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism: Modernist Poetry and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 4.

door to the family home 'sin querer' and proceeded to kill more of them than he originally intended in the darkness (64). Throughout the text, Rulfo evokes the perpetrator's self-alienated state by using cinematic close-ups to create an atomised focus on separate bodily elements. The opening tracking shot of Alcancía's feet scrambling up the hillside recreates the restrictive visual field of the moving camera by focusing on this specific body part:

Los pies del hombre se hundieron en la arena dejando una huella sin forma, como si fuera la pezuña de algún animal. Treparon sobre las piedras, engarruñándose al sentir la inclinación de la subida, luego caminaron hacia arriba, buscando el horizonte (61).

These visual techniques of framing and close-up are sustained in the following description of the man's feet as he moves along the mountain track: 'los pies siguieron la vereda, sin desviarse' (61). The impression created by these decontextualised images that his feet are operating independently from the rest of his body is reinforced by the use of the third-person plural form of the verbs *hundirse*, *trepar*, *caminar* and *seguir* to describe their movements. In a flashback to the murder, Rulfo continues to fragmentarily reveal Alcancía's body through the isolated and magnified images of his hand clasping a machete (63) and his face (63). These descriptions reproduce the visual ambiguity of cinematic representation which, as Seymour Chatman notes, 'does not describe at all but merely presents'.⁵⁸ In the close-up image of Alcancía's countenance we are told that 'le salían chorretes de lágrimas. O tal vez era sudor' (63). By refusing to clarify whether his face has been moistened by tears or sweat, Rulfo reproduces the disconnect between visual perception and lived sensation that conventionally distinguishes cinematic from literary imagery.

⁵⁸ Seymour Chatman, "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (and Vice Versa)", in *Literary Theories in Praxis*, ed. Shirley F. Staton (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 165.

Rulfo's literary integration of technologised modes of perception to articulate cognitive impairment and sensory-motor dislocation illustrates a decisive shift from Rivera's conceptualisation of technology as a tool for corporeal augmentation and discipline in the 1920s and 1930s. A striking feature of Rivera's murals from this earlier period is their emphasis on the role of visual technologies in facilitating human physiological improvement. In the grisaille panels of the SEP and later works such as *Man at the Crossroads* (New York City, 1932-1934 and subsequently Mexico City, 1934) and the *La historia de la cardiología* (1943-1944), Rivera depicts numerous optical devices pertaining to the field of medical science such as X-ray apparatuses and microscopes. In "A Small History of Photography" (1931), Benjamin claims that, along with photography, these new technologies of perception have opened up the realm of the 'optical unconscious'.⁵⁹ Benjamin explains how through its 'interruptions and isolations, its extensions and accelerations, its enlargements and reductions', modern visual technology has penetrated dimensions of reality previously inaccessible to the naked eye.⁶⁰

As Gallo has noted, despite the numerous allusions to technologised forms of vision in his works, Rivera never artistically experimented with the mechanical forms of representation available to him at the time such as photography or cinema.⁶¹ This suggests that, like the constructivists and the futurists, Rivera was more interested in the utopian possibilities of technology than its contemporary realities. Rulfo's literary works of the industrialising 'miracle' years, however, reflect how both human perception and aesthetic form have adapted to the integration of the machine into the fabric of everyday life and labour practices. In Rulfo's

⁵⁹ Walter Benjamin, "A Small History of Photography", in Walter Benjamin, *One Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: Verso, 1997), 242.

⁶⁰ Benjamin, "The Work of Art", 239.

⁶¹ Gallo, *Mexican Modernity*, 7.

texts, technology is not presented as a subject in or of itself, but is rather profoundly integrated into how reality is perceived.⁶²

In her analysis of high modernist literature, Sara Danius suggests that the works of Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann and Joyce reflect the increasing mechanisation of contemporary society by staging a progressive internalisation of the technological within the human body. Moving from Mann's early descriptions of the X-ray to the complete integration of technology into quotidian perception in Joyce, Danius illustrates how these works reveal a historical shift from *prosthesis* (the thematisation of the external device) to *aesthesis* (the interiorisation of technology).⁶³ In exploring the body's capacity to attune itself to the rhythms of industrial modernity, Rivera's and Rulfo's evolving machine aesthetics map a similar transition in the post-revolutionary context, from the external thematisation of technology to its infiltration of human cognitive and sensory processes. Moving from the muralist's prosthetic fantasy of the machine as a tool for corporeal augmentation, Rulfo's use of visual technologies to articulate sensory crisis reflects, in a Benjaminian sense, the alternative forms of training to which the body has been subjected in the fully industrialised environment.

⁶² Some technological apparatuses are directly mentioned in Rulfo's works. A reference is made in "Paso del Norte" to a gramophone (141) and a telegraph is mentioned in *PP* in a fragment relating to Paramo's youth (210). Preciado also carries a photograph of his mother Dolores (194).

⁶³ Sara Danius, *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics* (London: Cornell University Press, 2002), 3.

Part II: Corporeal Landscapes: Negotiating the Boundaries of Reproductive Femininity

Rivera's projection of the technologised male as the primary agent of societal transformation in his murals at the SEP and Detroit was consistent with gendered debates regarding revolutionary aesthetics that developed after 1920. Maples Arce's call for a visual language shaped by 'el espíritu revolucionario y la energía viril' found its most powerful expression in Rivera's pictorial language, which, according to Henríquez Ureña, exuded 'vigor masculino'.⁶⁴ A journalistic polemic regarding an appropriate form of 'revolutionary' literature was couched in similarly gendered terms. In a thinly veiled attack on the 'effeminate' cosmopolitanism of contemporary avant-garde writers such as the *Contemporáneos*, Julio Jiménez Rueda's article "El afeminamiento en la literatura mexicana", published in *El Universal* in 1924, lamented the lack of a sufficiently masculine literary style to narrate the nation's social revolution. Within days, Francisco Monterde had responded by upholding the masculinised prose of Mariano Azuela as evidence that a 'virile' revolutionary literature did in fact exist.⁶⁵

As these discussions make clear, the masculinisation of revolutionary culture established the feminine as antonymous to societal transformation and effectively excluded women from the national narrative. In this section of the chapter, I engage in a comparative analysis of Rivera's and Rulfo's representations of the female body to illuminate the gendered dimensions of their visual, architectural and literary narratives of revolutionary development. I suggest that the transformation of the female body from a state of containment to overflow across these works reflects a gradual unfixing of the restrictive state-endorsed models of female citizenship established in the early post-revolution period.

⁶⁴ Manuel Maples Arce, *El arte mexicano moderno* (London: A. Zwemmer, 1946) 21; Pedro Henríquez Ureña, "Diego Rivera", *El Mundo*, July 6, 1923, 3.

⁶⁵ Julio Jiménez Rueda, "El afeminamiento en la literatura mexicana", *El Universal*, December 21, 1924, n.p.; Francisco Monterde, "Existe una literatura viril", *El Universal*, December 25, 1924, n.p.

Although the military phase of the revolution (1910-1917) temporarily disturbed the established gender order in Mexico, the urgent project of national economic rehabilitation demanded the return to more conservative and primarily procreative models of female citizenship. This restriction of female societal participation to the sphere of reproduction to secure societal stability and prosperity took its cue from late nineteenth-century interpretations of femininity which, as Oliva López Sánchez explains, identified women as ‘el arsenal moralizante de la sociedad y las reproductoras de la materia humana necesaria para contribuir con el desarrollo económico de la joven nación’.⁶⁶

In the cultural sphere, this image of the self-abnegating mother as both procreator and moral custodian of Mexico’s citizens was championed by Gamio and the Chilean writer Gabriela Mistral, who was recruited by Vasconcelos to collaborate on the educational campaigns of the 1920s. Gamio looked to the ‘mujer femenina’ as ‘el factor primordial para producir el desarrollo armónico y el bienestar material e intelectual del individuo y la especie’.⁶⁷ Mistral upheld this notion that ‘la forma del patriotismo femenino es la maternidad perfecta’ in her educational text *Lecturas para mujeres* (1923) and in prose pieces such as “A la mujer mexicana” (1923), which reinforced the long-established link between female and natural generative forces by venerating the Mexican mother as a ‘colaboradora de la tierra’.⁶⁸ Defending these ideals from feminist criticism, Mistral asserted ‘yo no he reducido a la mujer a la maternidad: he querido circunscribirla, directa o indirectamente, al niño en los trabajos y en las profesiones’.⁶⁹ Mistral’s self-proclaimed intention to *circunscribir* the sphere of female

⁶⁶ Oliva López Sánchez, *Enfermas, mentirosas y temperamentales: la concepción médica del cuerpo femenino durante la segunda mitad del siglo XIX en México* (Mexico City: Plaza y Valdés Editores, 1998), 122.

⁶⁷ Gabriela Mistral, “Lecturas para mujeres”, in *La tierra tiene la actitud de una mujer*, ed. Pedro Pablo Zegers (Santiago de Chile: RIL Editores, 1999), 43.

⁶⁸ Mistral, “A la mujer Mexicana”, in *La tierra tiene la actitud de una mujer*, 129.

⁶⁹ Mistral, “Una nueva organización del trabajo”, in *La tierra tiene la actitud de una mujer*, 55.

activity underlines how, contrary to its egalitarian rhetoric, revolutionary culture consistently confined women's bodies to the domestic domain. These cultural models were complemented by emergent eugenics discourses. In his medical thesis of 1923, the eugenicist José Eduardo González insisted on the importance of sexual education campaigns in encouraging women to accept their maternal 'destiny' as both a social and moral obligation:

Un papel muy importante desempeñaría en nuestro medio la educación sexual puesto que para la mujer es muy difícil, si no imposible, tener conciencia de su destino: la procreación, sin el conocimiento de su obligación moral y de su papel social.⁷⁰

The 1930s saw the introduction of a more developed programme of what Alexandra Minna Stern terms 'maternalist eugenics', which brought the procreative and child-rearing abilities of Mexican women under scientific scrutiny and looked to 'produce a body politic untainted by dysgenic sexual unions'.⁷¹ As post-revolutionary criminal law continued to uphold the nineteenth-century assumption that sexuality was normal in males but deviant in females, the bodies of prostitutes and other non-maternal sexually active women were pathologised and excluded from the imagined national community.⁷² During the following decade, maternal citizenship was promoted through a nationwide competition run by the newspaper *Excélsior* for Mexico's most prolific mother in 1941 and the unveiling of the "Monumento de la Madre" by Miguel Alemán in 1949.

Although the state continued to promote a primarily domestic role for women, the international discrediting of Lamarckian theories of inheritance in the late 1930s, as noted in

⁷⁰ José Eduardo González, *Algunas consideraciones sobre eugénica* (Mexico City: Compañía Editora Latino Americana, 1923), 94.

⁷¹ Alexandra Minna Stern, "Responsible Mothers and Normal Children: Eugenics, Nationalism, and Welfare in Post- Revolutionary Mexico, 1920–1940", *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 12, no. 4 December (1999): 377, 369.

⁷² Katherine Elaine Bliss, *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health, and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico City* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 28.

the previous chapter, resulted in a shift away from sexual behaviour in eugenics discourses.⁷³ The expansion of the middle class towards the middle of the century also enabled more Mexican women to engage in cultural and artistic activities outside the domestic sphere. During the 1950s, a number of female writers began to break into the realm of literary production and test the generic and thematic boundaries that had conventionally been applied to women's writing.⁷⁴ Rosario Castellanos played a critical role in opening the literary field to women writers both in Mexico and Latin America. Building on her thesis *Sobre cultura femenina* (1950), a work that according to Elena Poniatowska provided 'el punto de partida para el movimiento femenino contemporáneo en México', Castellanos deconstructed notions of female biological determinism in her study *Declaración de fe* (1959).⁷⁵ Alongside Castellanos, the 1950s brought a number of other prominent female writers to the fore such as Poniatowska and Elena Garro, whose works engaged with the hitherto unexamined theme of female sexuality.

In this part of the chapter, I consider how this renegotiation of strictly procreative models of femininity is reflected in the alternative female corporeal landscapes mapped by Rivera and Rulfo. As in my previous readings, my discussion will move between different aesthetic forms, examining how the female body is presented in relation to visual, architectural and textual space in these works. Drawing on Plato's concept of *chora* and its subsequent reformulations by Julia Kristeva and Elisabeth Grosz, I examine Rivera's fresco cycle at the

⁷³ Schell, "Eugenics, Policy and Practice in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Mexico", 486.

⁷⁴ Ignacio Sánchez Prado, "La destrucción de la escritura viril y el ingreso de la mujer al discurso literario: *El libro vacío y Los recuerdos del Porvenir*", *Revista De Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 32, no. 63/64 (2006): 149-167; María Elena de Valdés, *The Shattered Mirror: Representations of Women in Mexican Literature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 144.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Consuelo Meza Márquez, *La utopía feminista: quehacer literario de cuatro narradoras mexicanas contemporáneas* (Aguascalientes: Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes, 2000), 53.

Escuela Nacional de Agricultura in Chapingo (1924-1927) alongside Rulfo's novel and the short story "Es que somos muy pobres", to trace a representational shift in depictions of the female body as it moves from a state of corporeal containment to one of openness and overflow.

By adopting the long-standing woman-as-land trope as its structuring principle, Rivera's mural programme at Chapingo metaphorically endorses contemporary state discourses regarding the sexual regulation and subordination of female bodies. Underlining the often overlooked spatial dimensions of his muralism, I demonstrate how both the visual and architectural aspects of the fresco cycle present feminised space as a clearly demarcated and contained territory to be productively occupied by man. Moving on to Rulfo's portrayal of female auto-eroticism and prostitution, I examine how Rivera's metaphorical equation of female fertility with revolutionary potentiality is complicated by Susana San Juan in *PP* and Tacha in "Es que somos muy pobres", whose non-reproductive sexuality poses a threat to national progress. Mapping a transition from fixed to fluid female corporeal landscapes in the works of both artists, I explore how this contravention of state-endorsed models of femininity is figured as a transgression of corporeal boundaries for Rulfo's women, whose overflowing bodily fluids symbolically merge with sea and rain water. The chapter also addresses the link between gender and narrative agency in these works. I contend that while Rivera foregrounds male agency in his visual and spatial narratives of revolution at Chapingo, Rulfo's female characters disrupt both societal and narrative order by aggressively colonising textual spaces and destabilising the masculine narrative architecture of his works.

Corporeal Cartographies: Controlling the Feminine Land in Chapingo (1924-1927)

Inspired by the motto of the Universidad Autónoma Chapingo, “Aquí se enseña la explotación de la tierra, no la del hombre”, Rivera’s mural programme at Chapingo revolves around a gendered metaphor of agrarian renewal that foregrounds man’s re-possession and productive exploitation of the fertile feminised land. Commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture in 1923, the 700m² mural programme is distributed over two architectural spaces: the former chapel, containing 41 panels of varying dimensions, and the upper floor of the administrative building which is decorated with four large landscape-scene murals. On entering the chapel, the observer is immediately confronted by the cycle’s centrepiece *La tierra liberada con las fuerzas naturales controladas por el hombre* (fig. 3.20), an expansive mural depicting the reclining nude figure of Rivera’s pregnant then-wife Lupe Marín configured in the form of the Yucatán Peninsula. This principal visual metaphor thematically links all of the panels contained within this architectural space. The nation again assumes feminine contours in the panels *La tierra oprimida* (fig.3.21), located on the upper archway of the west wall and *La tierra dormida* (fig.3.22), located in a lunette of the *coro alto*, where the Italian photographer Tina Modotti is envisaged as the sleeping virgin earth.

In these panels, Rivera offers a post-revolutionary interpretation of what had been a consistent trope in Mexican nationalist iconography since the early post-Conquest period. The fertile woman-as-land as a symbol of national potentiality appears as a central motif in post-independence paintings such as *Alegoría de la Patria* (1821) (fig.3.23) and again in Porfirian images, such as the illustrations of Riva Palacio’s *México a través de los siglos* (1884) (fig.3.24), where the feminised land embodies ‘la patria mestiza, moderna y lanzada hacia el

progreso'.⁷⁶ Adapting this motif to the post-revolutionary context, Rivera presents the fertile female as a metaphorical expression of national regeneration achieved through successful agrarian reform and modernisation. As in nineteenth-century applications of this trope, the muralist's imagery reflects the paradoxical position of women within traditional allegorical formulations of nationhood, whereby the female body metaphorically constitutes a national space from which the bodies of real material women are often excluded.

For Grosz, this feminine conception of space, which is deeply embedded in the Western philosophical tradition, can be traced back to Plato's description of chora as a neutral womb-like receptacle in *Timaeus* (c.360BC). The cartographic dimensions of Plato's concept, loosely associated with the idea of a country or demarcated landscape, are highlighted by Olwig, who notes the etymological linkage between chora and chorography, 'the study of the enclosed, bodily shapes of the earth'.⁷⁷ Elaborating on the geographical and architectural implications of chora, Grosz illustrates how this maternal analogy has provided the foundations of Western concepts of spatiality that use 'a disembodied femininity as the ground for the production of a (conceptual and social) universe'.⁷⁸ This understanding of the female body as the referent for both physical and abstract social spaces is important for understanding the visual and architectural dimensions of Rivera's agrarian-themed Chapingo cycle, which utilise the woman-as-land trope to conceptualise the female body as a vacant and bounded territory to be productively occupied and controlled by man.

⁷⁶ Enrique Florescano, *Imágenes de la patria a través de los siglos* (Mexico City: Santillana Ediciones Generales, 2006), 208. This trope also appears in picture cards commemorating the 1910 centenary of the Independence movement (fig.3.25).

⁷⁷ Kenneth Olwig, *Landscape, Nature, and the Body Politic: From Britain's Renaissance to America's New World* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 135.

⁷⁸ Elizabeth Grosz, "Woman, Chora, Dwelling", in *Architext: Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*, eds. Iain Borden et al. (London: Routledge, 2002), 210- 211.

While critics have tended to analyse the iconographic content of the chapel and the administrative wing separately, or indeed to entirely overlook the latter, an integrated analysis of Chapingo's entire visual programme reveals how both sets of murals play on the same metaphors of colonisation and containment in relation to the feminised landscape. In *La tierra liberada*, the prostrate feminised earth poses with her swollen stomach and full breasts exposed to the viewer, capturing the dual fantasies of 'maternal containment' and 'sexual assertion' that Annette Kolodny identifies as integral to the woman-as-land trope.⁷⁹ This fertile and sexually available female embodies a latent national potentiality waiting to be activated by the muscular mestizo standing before an electric turbomachine pointed directly toward her vagina. The phallic penetration of the feminised earth presented in this central mural is echoed in the panel *La organización del movimiento agrario*, located on the west wall, where a peasant positions a spade directly over the groin of a male worker as he sinks it into the soil, and in the adjacent *El agitador* (fig.3.26), where miners thrust into subterranean rock with drills and shovels positioned near their lower abdomen.⁸⁰ These sexualised metaphors depicting man's domination over nature are implicitly maintained in the murals situated on the first floor of the administrative building, such as *El buen gobierno* (fig.3.27), where tractors, pylons and railway lines indicate man's industrial colonisation of the landscape.⁸¹ This process of technological domination is again indicated by the use of cartographic technologies to extend control over the natural environment. In *Reparto de tierras* (fig.3.28), an exclusively male crowd of

⁷⁹ Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 67.

⁸⁰ These sexualised landscape metaphors offer a visual counterpart to the opening poem of Pablo Neruda's collection *Veinte poemas de amor* (1924): "Cuerpo de mujer, blancas colinas, muslos blancos, / te pareces al mundo en tu actitud de entrega. / Mi cuerpo de labriego salvaje te socava". Pablo Neruda, "Cuerpo de mujer..", in *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada*, ed. Gabriele Morelli (Salamanca: Colegio de España, 1995), 55, 1.1-5.

⁸¹ This backdrop is reminiscent of the nationalist imagery of Porfirian artist José María Velasco, whose panoramic scenes of railway lines cutting through the Mexican landscape upheld the regime's ideology of material progress.

peasants and government officials congregates around a map demarcating the surrounding land, while in *El buen gobierno* politicians and surveyors are shown using tripod-mounted telescopes and blueprints to measure the terrain.

The ongoing metaphorical interplay between the different landscape imagery in both sets of panels highlights a correlation between the strategies of territorial demarcation depicted in the administrative building and Rivera's painterly approach to the female body in the chapel. By transposing the geographical outline of Mexico onto Marín's body, *La tierra fecunda* establishes a direct parallel between the fixity of cartographic and corporeal borders that is reflected in the muralist's visual regulation of the female form. In modelling his allegorical figures on the classical ideal of the female nude, Rivera drew inspiration from a visual tradition that according to Lynda Nead has historically been concerned with the 'regulation and containment of the female sexual body'.⁸² Nead's suggestion that the configuration of the female nude as a bounded entity seeks to rectify the fluctuations of the real leaking female body is reflected in Rivera's emphasis on the corporeal boundaries of his female subjects.⁸³

Years after completing the cycle, the artist recalled how Marín's figure had left an indelible imprint on his imagination: 'las curvas y sombras de esa maravillosa creación dejaron una huella imborrable en mi cerebro de pintor'.⁸⁴ In *La tierra fecunda*, Rivera applies the technique of *chiaroscuro* to her rounded breasts, thighs and belly to lend a sculpted definition to these bodily contours. This heavy shading imposes a unbroken outline around the circumference of her body that brings her pale *mestiza* complexion into even greater relief against the dark ochre tone of the surrounding space. Male Mexican art historians have stressed

⁸² Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992), 6.

⁸³ Nead, *The Female Nude*, 1.

⁸⁴ Rivera, *Mi arte, mi vida*, 111.

the muralist's mastery of line, form and proportionality in his composition of the nude elsewhere in the cycle. Discussing Rivera's depiction of Modotti as *La tierra dormida*, another female figure that adopts the lateral supine pose typical of the classical nude, Justino Fernández praises Rivera's capacity to adjust 'sus formas y líneas al efecto decorativo, sereno y grandioso, según el ideal clásico', while Antonio Rodríguez commends his use of regulating lines and shading in the panel *Maduración* (fig.3.29) to 'regulate' the female form and create an overall impression of bodily integrity and proportionality:⁸⁵

El dibujo respeta la sensualidad de la línea, las proporciones de las partes y la integración de éstas al todo. La luz y la sombra, al modular el cuerpo, completan la tarea del dibujo, el cual se propone aquí alcanzar, por la máxima representación de la verdad poética, el más alto ideal de la belleza.⁸⁶

Rivera's classical emphasis on the borders of the female nude in Chapingo is of course particularly important given its function as an expression of the national territory. This interpretation of the female form as a vast maternal container for Mexico's citizens is visualised in the panels adorning the east wall such as *Germinación* (fig.3.30), where bulb-like foetuses are suspended in a cavernous subterranean environment, and in *La sangre de los mártires revolucionarios fertilizando la tierra* (fig.3.31), located in the chapel's vestibule, where the corpses of revolutionary leaders Otilio Montañón and Emiliano Zapata inhabit the soil beneath a glowing cornfield. Reflecting Paz's assertion that Rivera interpreted matter in fundamentally feminine terms ('la concibe como una madre, como un gran vientre, una gran boca y una gran tumba'), these interlinking images of gestation and posthumous repose present the maternal land as a kind of all-receiving receptacle for Mexico's past and future revolutionaries.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Justino Fernández, *Arte moderno y contemporáneo de México* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2001), 328.

⁸⁶ Antonio Rodríguez, *Canto a la tierra: los murales de Diego Rivera en la capilla de Chapingo* (Chapingo: Universidad Autónoma Chapingo, 1986), 14.

⁸⁷ Paz, "Los muralistas a primera vista", 712.

This metaphorical conception of the feminine body as a choratic vessel for the nation's citizens also operates on an architectural level within the fresco cycle. Plato's understanding of chora as an intermediate womb-like matrix that provides 'the point of entry, as it were, into material existence' suggests a link between the gendered visual and spatial metaphors operating in both the chapel and administrative building which, as I will attempt to illustrate, trace the evolution of the revolution from its ideological inception to realisation.⁸⁸ As in all of his mural projects, Rivera's artistic intentions at Chapingo were primarily didactic; to serve the political interests of the masses by acting as 'un organizador de conciencia y ayudar a su organización social'.⁸⁹

Reflecting Grosz's interpretation of chora as 'the ground for the production of a (conceptual and social) universe', Rivera configures the feminised architectural space of the chapel as an ideological site of becoming that facilitates the formation of a revolutionary consciousness in the viewing subject.⁹⁰ In the confined and dimly-lit space of the chapel, images of rest and gestation are combined with a palette of predominantly warm red and earthy tones to transform its interior into an intimate and distinctly womb-like environment. Rivera emphasises this impression of an enclosed uterine space by embellishing the chapel's semi-cylindrical vaulted ceiling with 'intersecting mouldings to create the appearance of a rib vault'.⁹¹ By decoratively accentuating this aspect of the ceiling's structure, the muralist establishes a visual connection between this vast concave space and the protruding, ribbed form of Marín's abdomen in the cycle's centrepiece. Architectural and female reproductive

⁸⁸ Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (London: Routledge, 1995), 115.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Antonio Rodríguez, *Canto a la tierra*, 8.

⁹⁰ Grosz, "Woman, *Chora*, Dwelling", 210-211.

⁹¹ Luis-Martín Lozano, "Song to the Earth and those who labor thereon: Universidad Autónoma de Chapingo, Mexico, 1923-1927", in *Diego Rivera: The Complete Murals*, eds. Luis-Martín Lozano and Juan Rafael Coronel Rivera (London: Taschen, 2008), 140.

anatomical forms again converge in the panel *Maduración* on the east wall, where a recessed window is integrated into the composition to create the impression of a vaginal opening. Configured as a giant vulvar flower, Rodríguez describes the rounded aperture as a giant orifice.⁹²

The significance of Rivera's spatial configuration of the chapel interior in terms of the female reproductive anatomy is illuminated by the sustained metaphorical parallel between social and organic evolution established in the two sets of panels on either side of the central nave. Evoking the positivist analogy between history and the natural sciences, Rivera directly compares the early stages of the revolutionary struggle in *La transformación social* to the biological evolutionary processes depicted in *La evolución natural* (fig.3.32). This comparison between the development of revolutionary ideology and that of human life suggests that the viewer should navigate the womb-like space of the chapel first before proceeding to the administrative building. By experiencing Chapingo's visual programme in this order, the viewer moves from the allegorical scenes of biological and revolutionary gestation depicted in the chapel's shadowy and muted environment to the naturally illuminated space of the administrative building.⁹³ Here, scenes of upright male workers and politicians actively cultivating the land reflect the fruition of the movement's social objectives. This implied shift from the theoretical conception of the revolution to its realisation, or in choratic terms, from form to material existence, is also registered on a stylistic level as the abstract symbolic imagery of the chapel gives way to the more realist visual language of the administration building.

⁹² Rodríguez, *Canto a la tierra*, 14.

⁹³ Rivera's linking of female bodily forms with contained and dimly lit architectural spaces is also evident in his SEP scenes of the nude Tehuanas discussed in Chapter One. These panels are located in the enclosed elevator vestibule which is cut off from the main *Patio del Trabajo*.

Understanding these gendered architectural components of the fresco programme reveals how Rivera foregrounds male agency in both pictorial and spatial terms. By portraying agrarian renewal through sexualised metaphors of territorial control and colonisation, the cycle addresses an implicitly male observer who mobilises its visual narrative of revolutionary progress by re-enacting these strategies of spatial occupation as he negotiates the two buildings. Rivera's identification of man as an agent of both historical and narrative progress within the feminised visual and architectural spaces of Chapingo endorses a long-standing gendered dualism between time and space that holds significant societal implications. As Massey points out, this codification of 'history, progress, civilization, politics and transcendence' as masculine, and space, absence or lack as feminine is inseparable from a philosophical and societal viewpoint that associates the female with 'stasis, passivity and depoliticisation'.⁹⁴ By utilising the female form as the metaphorical basis for his image of the nation at Chapingo, Rivera creates a spatial and visual narrative of revolutionary development from which real female bodies are implicitly excluded.

Renegotiating the Boundaries of Post-Revolutionary Femininity in Rulfo's Literature

The visual and architectural metaphors operating in Chapingo uphold the fundamental assumption in Western thought that 'woman is/provides a space for man, but occupies none herself'.⁹⁵ In the domain of post-revolutionary art, Rivera's vision of a spatially bounded female body was most radically deconstructed in the works of his wife, Frida Kahlo. Railing against the epic form and heroic pictorial idiom of the *escuela mexicana*, Kahlo's

⁹⁴ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), 6.

⁹⁵ Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2001), 159.

psychoanalytic self-portraits of the mid-1930s unsettled post-revolutionary ideals of reproductive femininity by foregrounding a sterile, mutilated and leaking maternal body. A tragic miscarriage suffered by Kahlo while Rivera was carrying out the Detroit fresco cycle provides the inspiration for the lithograph *El aborto* (1932) (fig.3.33) and the painting *Henry Ford Hospital* (1932) (fig.3.34). In both works, the rupturing of biologically ‘functional’ forms of femininity is addressed as a breakdown of corporeal boundaries as tears and blood gush forth from the artist’s eyes and vagina.

Kahlo’s visceral self-portraits herald a broader shift towards an aesthetics of abjection in artistic representations of the female body during the post-revolutionary period in Mexico. In “Powers of Horror”, Julia Kristeva defines the abject as that which must be expelled from the self, such as excrement, tears, sweat, menstrual blood and other bodily fluids conventionally associated with the feminine that threaten the physical limits of the body. Building on Mary Douglas’s identification of the inseparability of bodily and socio-cultural boundaries, Kristeva illustrates how the abject ‘threatens the unity and identity of both society and the subject’ by calling into question the very ‘boundaries upon which they are constructed’.⁹⁶ In post-revolutionary literary production, the abject interlinking of social and bodily transgression articulated by Kahlo re-emerges in Castellanos’s poetry and prose writings of the 1950s, which foreground a grotesque and porous female body to explore themes such as infertility, miscarriage, lesbianism and female masturbation.⁹⁷ This poetics of abjection is further developed in the later works of Elena Poniatowska and Ángeles Mastretta which, as

⁹⁶ Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva: Unravelling the Double-bind* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) 56.

⁹⁷ On the grotesque in Castellanos see Nuala Finnegan, *Monstrous Projections of Femininity in the Fiction of Mexican Writer Rosario Castellanos* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000). Castellanos’s most explicit masturbation imagery surfaces in the poem “Kinsey Report”: ‘A veces despierto derramándome/ y me cuesta decirle al confesor/ que otra vez he caído porque la carne es flaca’. Rosario Castellanos, “Kinsey Report”, in *Poesía no eres tú. Obra poética: 1948-1971* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1972), 329, 4.55-57.

Jane Lavery notes, engage in a 're-mapping' of the female body through descriptions of female masturbation and orgasm.⁹⁸ In what follows, I position Rulfo within this broader attempt to aesthetically renegotiate female sexual identity by illustrating how resistance to biologically functional forms of femininity is conveyed as an unfixing of bodily boundaries in his works.

The theme of failed maternity so poignantly explored in Kahlo's self-portraits recurs throughout *PP*, where female characters fail to fulfil a reproductive function due to their physical and mental deterioration or sexual deviancy. Building on the prevalent theme of frustrated motherhood in *LL*, Rulfo presents us with a cast of infertile would-be mothers in Comala.⁹⁹ Like Damiana Cisneros, who claims to have nursed him as a child (222), Eduviges asserts the status of surrogate mother to Juan, telling him 'te considero como mi hijo' (201). Driven insane by her maternal longing, Dorotea *La Cuarraca* searches feverishly for her imaginary offspring but is clearly equally incapable of childbearing due to her severely malnourished state.¹⁰⁰ Abundio's remark in the novel's opening pages that the mothers of Comala 'nos malparieron en un petate' (196) again underlines the impossibility of healthy childbirth in Comala by suggesting that he and the other villagers were paradoxically the product of a spontaneous abortion. The implication that healthy procreation is impossible in the Rulfian universe is further suggested by recurring references to incest. Following on from allusions to inappropriate sexual relations in "En la madrugada" and "Acuérdate", it is heavily implied in *PP* that Susana has been the victim of her father's sexual advances while the

⁹⁸ Jane Lavery, "The Physical and Textual Body in the Works of Ángeles Mastretta and Elena Poniatowska", *Romance Studies* 19, no.2 (2001): 174.

⁹⁹ Rulfo's short stories are replete with references to maternal and infant mortality. The mothers of Urbano in "La noche que lo dejaron solo" and Ignacio in "No oyes ladrar los perros" die during childbirth while "La vida no es muy seria en sus cosas" ends with a pregnant woman falling down a flight of stairs. In "Acuérdate" la Berenjena says that she has spent all her money on funerals for her children and Alcancía of "El hombre" recalls recently burying his child.

¹⁰⁰ Her stomach is 'engarrñado por las hambres y por el poco comer' (249).

anonymous woman encountered by Juan in ‘Los Confines’ admits that she and her brother Donis have attempted to repopulate the town.¹⁰¹

While these instances of sterility and incest clearly unsettle the ideal of healthy reproductive femininity promoted by the post-revolutionary state, I will focus here on Susana San Juan of *PP* and Tacha of the short story “Es que somos muy pobres” as examples of two Rulfian women who pose a threat to national development due to their non-reproductive sexuality. In *Foundational Fictions*, her landmark study of Latin American nation-building narratives that allegorise postbellum national consolidation through the trope of heterosexual marriage, Doris Sommer underscores the societal threat posed by unproductive female eroticism, which is deemed ‘unnatural, immoral and unpatriotic’.¹⁰² As the possibility of a consummated heterosexual union is thwarted by Susana’s non-procreative sexuality and Tacha’s seemingly imminent fall into prostitution, both of Rulfo’s texts can be read as staunchly anti-foundational post-revolutionary narratives. Focusing on the representation of auto-eroticism and prostitution, I argue that the violation of state-endorsed models of reproductive womanhood is figured as a transgression of corporeal boundaries for these female characters, whose bodily fluids spill outwards to symbolically merge with sea and flood water. Building on Sommer’s work, Debra A. Castillo illustrates how the transgressive capacity of the so-called ‘loose woman’ is registered on a narrative level in Mexican literary works that position the sexually liberated female or prostitute ‘at the very point at which both societal and narrative order are disrupted’.¹⁰³ Highlighting the link between bodily and vocal excess in

¹⁰¹ On Bartolomé’s relationship with Susana, Fulgor comments: ‘por el modo como la trata más bien parece su mujer’ (269).

¹⁰² Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 266.

¹⁰³ Debra A. Castillo, *Easy Women: Sex and Gender in Modern Mexican Fiction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 16.

Rulfo's works, I explore how the doubly subversive function of the 'loose woman' is performed by Susana and Tacha, who overturn socially accepted models of womanhood and disrupt narrative order by invading textual space and disturbing the masculine narrative architecture of these works.

The Non-Procreative Auto-Eroticism of Susana San Juan

The aforementioned examples of female sterility, incest and dysfunctional sexuality uphold Hugo Hernán Ramírez's assertion that, in Rulfo's literature, 'los personajes femeninos desbordan los estereotipos de virgen o madre'.¹⁰⁴ Although Ramírez does not comment on Rulfo's female bodily imagery, his use of the verb *desbordar*, meaning 'to exceed' but also 'to overflow' hints at the corporeal implications of this transgression of culturally accepted expressions of femininity. In *PP*, this alternative model of femininity is most powerfully embodied by the principal female character Susana San Juan, whose non-reproductive auto-eroticism challenges the ideal of self-abnegating motherhood. Although Páramo tightens his tyrannical grip on Comala by colonising its land and raping its women, Susana, the true object of his desire, eludes his possession for over thirty years. After orchestrating the death of her father, the *cacique* is finally wed to Susana but their marriage remains unconsummated as she progressively sinks into insanity and retreats to her adolescent memories of sexual awakening. The historical sequence of these events is significant. If Rulfo situates Susana's exuberant adolescent sexuality in the early Porfirian period of the mid-1880s, and her mental and physical deterioration during the mid to late 1920s, as Valdés suggests, her narrative of bodily decay directly inverts the gendered metaphors of post-revolutionary regeneration that were being

¹⁰⁴ Hugo Hernán Ramírez, "El personaje femenino en los cuentos de Juan Rulfo", *Iberoamericana* 8, no.30 (2008): 47.

configured by Rivera during precisely the same period.¹⁰⁵

A striking but overlooked aspect of Rulfo's treatment of Susana is his spatial representation of her experiences as both an object and subject of sexual desire. Throughout the novel, attempts by oppressive male figures to control Susana's body are associated with literal and figurative forms of burial. In an almost macabre reimagining of Rivera's subterranean nudes at Chapingo, Susana addresses us from the confines of her coffin following her death at the Media Luna. Her real interment is foreshadowed by the description of her sickbed at Páramo's ranch as a 'sepultura de sábanas' (298) and an even earlier childhood memory, when the incestuous Bartolomé lowers her into a mineshaft where she discovers a crumbling skeleton (278). By contrast, Susana's memories of her youthful erotic experiences in the ocean are characterised by imagery of bodily and spatial openness: 'Tenía [...] los brazos abiertos, desdobladas las piernas [...] Y el mar allí enfrente, lejano' (282). In this deeply lyrical passage, which occurs in the final third of the novel, the semi-conscious Susana recalls how her lover Florencio followed her to swim naked in the sea. Destabilising conventional tropes aligning the female body with a passive landscape, Rulfo likens Susana's exuberant sexuality to the untameable force of the sea. Although the episode has been widely interpreted as a sex scene, Florencio's peripherality throughout the passage suggests that Susana's immersion in the sea should in fact be read as a metaphor for masturbation. Her observation that Florencio 'se sintió solo a pesar de estar yo allí' (282) and his subsequent assertion that he prefers to make love to her 'bajo las sábanas en la oscuridad' (283) clearly indicate his exclusion and discomfort. He finally abandons her as she engages in an act of foreplay with the waves:

¹⁰⁵ De Valdés, *The Shattered Mirror*, 35.

Volví yo. Volvería siempre. El mar moja mis tobillos y se va; moja mis rodillas, mis muslos; rodea mi cintura con su brazo suave, da vuelta sobre mis senos; se abraza de mi cuello; aprieta mis hombros. Entonces me hundo en él, entera. Me entrego a él en su fuerte batir, en su suave poseer, sin dejar pedazo (283).

The repetition of the verb *mojar* alongside the sexually charged images of sea water suggest the overspilling of Susana's bodily fluids as she climaxes, while the repetition of the pronouns 'yo', 'me' and 'mi' reinforce the self-focus of her sexual act. As de Valdés notes, Susana's behaviour in this episode exemplifies what Kristeva describes as *jouissance*, a form of female sexual enjoyment that exceeds or 'goes beyond' the phallus and thus the limits of patriarchal order.¹⁰⁶ Kristeva's *jouissance* represents a radical repossession of Plato's concept of chora from a feminist theoretical perspective. Kristeva links this auto-erotic female pleasure back to the pre-phallic maternal sphere of chora, which she compares to the sea in its all-encompassing rhythmic pulsations. In this sense, Susana's return to the ocean through memory ('Volví yo. Volvería siempre') can be interpreted as an attempt to escape a sexually oppressive male environment and turn 'back towards the auto-erotic body'.¹⁰⁷ This symbolic return to the womb is further suggested by the fact that Susana dies in the foetal position: 'sintió que la cabeza se le clavaba en el vientre' (302).

Kristeva underlines the linguistic dimensions of chora by identifying it as the source of a semiotic pre-verbal mode of communication that precedes the phallogocentric symbolic order on which social law is based. Her assertion that the libidinal impulse of chora is channelled through a subversive poetic discourse that accentuates the bodily elements of language such as rhyme, alliteration and onomatopoeia reveals how Rulfo's novel confers a level of narrative

¹⁰⁶ De Valdés, *The Shattered Mirror*, 50; Megan Becker-Leckrone, *Julia Kristeva and Literary Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 157.

¹⁰⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 49.

agency to the female body that is denied by Rivera's fresco cycle. In *PP*, this semiotic impulse manifests itself in the rhythmic discourse through which Susana articulates her desires and challenges patriarchal authority. Mirroring her bodily overflow, Susana's voice increasingly invades narrative space over the course of the novel. While the first part of the text is predominantly narrated by Preciado and Páramo, fragments 41-64 are dominated by Susana, whose increasingly frequent and lengthy vocal interjections drown out these male voices. Although Susana is initially confined to Páramo's adolescent fantasies, her acquisition of speech allows her to assert both sexual and narrative agency.¹⁰⁸ The images of excessive water linking Susana's narrative intrusions (276, 279) establish a lyrical connection between her vocal and sexual empowerment, creating the impression that she is verbally flooding the text.

These rambling monologues establish Susana as the producer of a rebellious and profoundly corporeal discourse that unsettles the patriarchal order of Comala by denying male ownership of her body; she refuses to acknowledge Bartolomé as her father and rejects the attempts by Padre Rentería to perform the last rites on her. When the priest instructs her to repeat the prayer, she erotically distorts his words into a grotesque image of bodily overflow: 'Tengo la boca llena de ti – de tu boca [...] Trago saliva espumosa; mastico terrones plagados de gusanos que se me anudan en la garganta y raspan la pared del paladar' (300). This description of her mouth foaming with filthy saliva, captures what Kristeva identifies as the 'sonorous distinctiveness' of poetic language.¹⁰⁹ Recalling the earlier alliterative description of her sexual emancipation, where the repetition of 'm' sounds (*mojar, mi*) evokes her murmurs

¹⁰⁸ Susana is not the only female character to display sexual or narrative assertiveness. Dolores, Eduviges and Dorotea function as key catalysts for narrative development by guiding the directionless Preciado through Comala. Eduviges willingly replaces Dolores on her wedding night to Páramo ('Me acosté con él, con gusto, con ganas', 207) while Donis's incestuous sister coerces Preciado into sleeping with her ('Vente a dormir aquí conmigo', 245).

¹⁰⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora and Alice A. Jardine (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), 135.

of pleasure, the repetition of ‘s’ and ‘p’ sounds (*espumosa, plagado, pared, paladar*) in these lines create a forceful plosive effect, suggesting that she is spitting the words out from her dirt-filled mouth.¹¹⁰

Dynamics of Expulsion and Invasion in “Es que somos muy pobres”

The association established in *PP* between the unbridled power of water and female sexuality is maintained in “Es que somos”, where the developing body of the pubescent Tacha is likened to the destructive surge of a rising flood. As with Susana, Tacha’s disruption of patriarchal order is portrayed in spatial terms, this time through interlinking bodily and natural imagery of expulsion and invasion. This story opens with Tacha’s brother explaining how a sudden flood has destroyed his father’s crops and swept away the cow which was intended to be the dowry for his twelve-year-old sister. As the downpour persists over the following days, the water is thrust up from the riverbed, sweeping over the bridge and up the street. The narrator fears the incessant rain will collapse the roof of the family home, as it did the house of a local woman called *La Tambora*, where it entered ‘en grandes chorros por la puerta’ (56). The narrator predicts that Tacha, now bereft of her dowry, will follow her two older sisters, who were cast out by their father after becoming prostitutes. By anticipating Tacha’s abrupt transfer from one male-dominated system of economic exchange (marriage payments) to another (prostitution), the story deftly exposes the contradictory sexual and social demands made on the female body within an oppressive patriarchal society.

¹¹⁰ This alliterative effect is also produced in Susana’s recollection of caressing her own adolescent body: ‘mis manos temblaban tibias al tocar mis senos’ (264).

Diverging from dominant Mexican narratives of prostitution such as Federico Gamboa's *Santa* (1903), a novel that illustrates the necessary expulsion of the corrupted woman from the national community, the flood does not seal Tacha's ruination, but rather triggers a profound physiological transformation that converts her body into a site of uncontrollable power. The natural catastrophe that has devastated the town coincides with the pubescent development of her body, manifesting itself most clearly in her swelling breasts which inspire awe in her brother and fear in her father, who declares her a danger to the family.¹¹¹ The risk to familial and social order posed by her burgeoning sexuality is suggested by the narrator's comparison of her fluctuating body to the surging flood water that threatens to destroy their home. As in the imagery of corporeal ruination examined in the previous chapter, Rulfo is here concerned with an indeterminate, processual body. With potentially incestuous desire, the narrator watches her breasts heave up and down as she sobs as if the river were now swelling up inside her. Like the river, which has 'perdido sus orillas', the girl's bodily contours dissolve and 'por su cara corren chorretes de agua sucia' (56). The connection between natural and specifically female bodily fluids is further suggested by the narrator's subsequent comparison of Tacha to a 'palo de ocote', a variety of pine known for producing a thick whitish resin (59).

Like Susana, Tacha's contravention of accepted forms of femininity is presented in terms of both corporeal and vocal eruption. While Tacha is sketched as a vague and mute figure in early stages of the story, the rapid growth of her body in the final paragraphs is matched by her increasing vocal presence as she begins to emit an overpowering non-human sound. These unintelligible cries, which again exemplify a semiotic privileging of bodily impulses over logic

¹¹¹ 'Pero mi papá alega que aquello ya no tiene remedio. La peligrosa es la que queda aquí, la Tacha' (59).

and sound over sense, are juxtaposed with the discourse of the brother-narrator, who comes to represent the patriarchal logic governing the community by faithfully repeating the father's judgements ('Según mi papá', 'papá alega que', 59). Although the brother speaks in an unsettlingly adult manner regarding the fates of Tacha and his other sisters, his narrative authority is undermined by his inability to comprehend her sudden bodily and vocal outburst, which he can only compare to the river:

Yo la abrazo tratando de consolarla, pero ella no entiende. Llora con más ganas. De su boca sale un ruido semejante al que se arrastra por las orillas del río, que la hace temblar y sacudirse todita (59).

This sustained comparison is significant, as it indicates that like the river, Tacha exceeds the descriptive capacities of language. The river's resistance to linguistic definition is suggested when the siblings scale the river bank to listen to the voices of the villagers watching the water, but hear no sound emerging from their open mouths. His description of the river as 'la cosa aquella' reveals, as Rowe notes, that the flood water 'cannot be contained in words, or not in the words the boy until then had at his disposal'.¹¹² The boy's comparison of the uncontrollable force within Tacha with that of the flood suggests that she too resists containment in the systems of signification available to him. While the brother's narrative authority is undermined by his inability to describe Tacha's transformation, other linguistic details in the text confer narrative agency to her body. Although the father intends to expel Tacha from the familial home, as he did her two older sisters, the verbs employed in the story appear to reverse this movement by suggesting her power over the men around her. Recalling the invasive movement

¹¹² William Rowe, *Rulfo, El llano en llamas* (London: Grant & Cutler, 1987), 71.

of the water flooding the village, the narrator tells us that their father is *filled* with shame when he realises that Tacha's body will *fill* the gaze of any man.¹¹³

Susana and Tacha stand alongside other abject Rulfian women whose subversive sexuality is articulated as a transgression of corporeal boundaries. The unfaithful Natalia of "Talpa" weeps for days on end (77) while Macario's nurse Felipa, who engages in a sexual relationship with the mentally disabled narrator, is associated with a sweet-tasting milk that flows from her breast 'en chorros' (91). The incestuous sister of Donis in *PP* is similarly linked to bodily fluids, sweating excessively as she sleeps beside Juan before dissolving into 'un charco de lodo' (245). Situated alongside Kahlo's and Castellanos's visual and textual images of uncontained female corporeality, the women spilling through Rulfo's fiction embody a movement away from the models of contained female corporeality that inform the visual and architectural composition of Rivera's Chapingo cycle. Through a comparative analysis of the interplay between bodily and natural forms, I have suggested that this representational shift can be mapped as a transition from fixed to fluid feminine corporeal landscapes in their works. Disrupting the assumptions of passivity and bounded corporeality conventionally associated with the woman-as-land trope, Rulfo's equation of female sexuality with the formless and uncontrollable power of water reconceptualises woman's alliance with nature as a source of empowerment, and transforms Susana San Juan and Tacha into active narrative agents. Although Rulfo has never been considered a feminist writer, his literature undeniably exposes the sexual and economic oppression of Mexican women and consistently subverts the model of reproductive femininity on which the post-revolutionary state sought to build the nation's economic future.

¹¹³ 'le entra la mortificación a mi papá', 58; 'le llenará los ojos a cualquiera', 59.

Rulfo's anti-foundational narratives of female sexuality can be situated within a broader effort in his literature to unfix the corporeal narratives of revolutionary progress that were discursively and artistically constructed in the previous decades. As I outlined at the beginning of this chapter, the programme of post-revolutionary economic *desarrollismo* implemented by the Mexican state in the decades following the revolution evolved in conjunction with a parallel campaign of bodily developmentalism that sought to harness the procreative capacity of Mexican women while fashioning a male corporeal ideal in accordance with the industrial principles of efficiency and discipline. By analysing selected murals produced by Rivera between 1923 and 1933, I demonstrated how the artist's corporeal imagery upholds the gendered framework of (re)productive citizenship promoted by the government by projecting man as a technologised agent of societal transformation and woman as the fertile embodiment of a post-revolutionary national potentiality. While the productive bodies populating Rivera's murals articulate the utopian impulse for a progressive Mexican future during the 1920s and 1930s, Rulfo's literature reflects a mid-century cultural climate in which the definition of 'revolutionary progress' had become the focus of increasing scrutiny. By figuring the mechanised male subject in terms of breakdown and dysfunction and exploring non-reproductive expressions of female sexuality, Rulfo's work consistently presents literary bodies that challenge narratives of national development and put the future of the post-revolutionary nation in doubt.

Chapter Four

Revolutionary Redemption in the Countryside:

Rural Reform and the Campesino Mass

Arguably one of the most progressive charters of its era, the Mexican Constitution of 1917 promised sweeping changes to rural life. Recognising the peasantry as key beneficiaries of the revolution, Article 27 affirmed the state's intention to 'garantizar a la población campesina el bienestar y su participación e incorporación en el desarrollo nacional'.¹ Rural integration became a prominent theme in political discourse as the state, having only recently emerged from a violent civil conflict that had mobilised large sections of the peasant population, looked to consolidate its control over the countryside. After 1920, national integration was pursued through a rural development programme based on educational and land reform that sought to bring order to the countryside, increase its productivity and nationalise its inhabitants. The Catholic Church, profoundly integrated into the social fabric of rural life, posed the largest obstacle to this project of revolutionary reform. Although the Constitution had brought the revolution's armed phase to a close, its anti-clerical provisions reignited Mexico's longest-standing institutional conflict. In the eyes of the modernising state, the church fostered fanaticism, alcoholism and other prevalent social pathologies that obstructed the nation's path to revolutionary progress. In order to establish itself as the sole arbiter of national values, the state increasingly challenged the church for control over Mexican hearts and minds during the 1920s and 1930s. While the Obregón administration refrained from reinforcing the Constitution's more radical provisions to maintain stability during the early reconstruction

¹Mexican Const. art. XXVII, § 20.

years, Calles's aggressive anti-clerical stance significantly heightened Church-State tensions, ultimately culminating in the violent peasant uprising known as the Cristero War (1926–1929).

Before examining how rural reform was implemented through the government's education and agrarian programmes of the 1920s and 1930s, it is important to first provide an overview of the complex and contradictory links that developed between religion and revolutionary politics during these decades. In addition to its anti-clerical policies, which dramatically restricted the church's social and political authority, the state looked to symbolically supplant institutionalised religion by appropriating Christian rituals, rhetoric and imagery to construct a new revolutionary creed as an alternative source of national identity and cohesion. Borrowing the phrase coined by French historian Mona Ozouf, Guillermo Palacios argues that the post-revolutionary period witnessed a 'transferencia de la sacralidad' in which politicians and intellectuals adopted Catholic rites in order to 'transferirle al nuevo Estado los contenidos de la identidad nacional y la fuerza consolidadora depositados en ellos'.² The state's appropriation of religious frameworks to articulate its secular political agenda again highlights the post-revolutionary continuity of Porfirian thinking. As Acevedo and Ramírez explain, during the Díaz regime:

se sustituye deliberada y conscientemente el catolicismo, que había fungido como el gran cohesionador de la identidad patria, por una nueva religión, con sus figuras fundadoras y sus santos, sus rituales y liturgias y sus oficiantes: lo que Justo Sierra, usando un término de uso corriente llamaba, "la religión de la patria".³

² Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Guillermo Palacios, *La pluma y el arado: los intelectuales pedagogos y la construcción sociocultural del "problema campesino" en México, 1932-1934* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1999), 149.

³ Esther Acevedo and Fausto Ramírez, introduction to *Los pinceles de la historia: La fabricación del estado, 1864-1910* (Mexico City: Museo Nacional de Arte, 2003), 18.

After 1920, a new revolutionary religion was forged along similar lines, through the mythification of political saints and the construction of a secular moral doctrine founded on the revolutionary tenets of hard work and patriotism. The introduction of more aggressive socialist policies in the 1930s saw the implementation of a *Calendario Nacionalista* that replaced traditional saints' days with revolutionary anniversaries and the eradication of Catholic rites in favour of new civic rituals such as the *Domingos Culturales* and *Domingos Rojos*.⁴ In the countryside, educational and agrarian propaganda drew heavily from Christian vocabularies to portray state intervention as a crusade of revolutionary redemption. As founder of the *Grupo Solidario del Movimiento Obrero*, Lombardo Toledano upheld agrarian reform as the realisation of the Gospels, while government propaganda presented the state agronomist as a Christ-like arbiter of rural justice. In an attempt to challenge the church's grip on rural education, which had been strengthened by the church-state *détente* during the Porfiriato, the SEP dispatched *maestros misioneros* to remote rural areas to spread the state's secular doctrine to local communities.

Religious rhetoric appealed to revolutionary reformers looking to communicate their secular societal vision in the countryside for several reasons. As religion constituted the primary cultural framework through which most Mexicans understood the world, the universal intelligibility of Christian vocabularies and their affective appeal proved attractive to post-revolutionary nation-builders looking to secure popular consent.⁵ Due to the cultural dominance of the church and its longstanding influence on education, even non-believers were

⁴ Adrian A. Bantjes, "Saints, Sinners and State Formation", in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920–1940*, eds. Mary K. Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 146.

⁵ Ilene V. O'Malley, *The Myth of Revolution: Hero Cults and the Institutionalization of the Mexican State, 1920–1940* (London: Greenwood, 1986), 130.

familiar with the basic tenets of Christianity.⁶ Additionally, by recasting the revolution within a Christian schema, official rhetoric tapped into the strict codes of obedience embedded in the Roman Catholic mentality and looked to redirect this unquestioning faith toward state as the sole interpreter of ‘los sagrados intereses de la Revolución y de la Patria’.⁷ Biblical metaphors were selectively incorporated into official propaganda to project the state as the saviour of the rural masses and thus encourage an attitude of political passivity on the part of the latter.

While the post-revolutionary political appropriation of Christian rhetoric has been examined by historians such as Ilene O’Malley and Adrian Bantjes, the use of religious symbolism in artistic production of this period has not yet been explored.⁸ By analysing a range of media including murals, illustrations, literature and film, my final chapter will begin to fill this gap in scholarship by examining how Rivera and Rulfo employ biblical metaphors and religious concepts to portray the campesino collective in the context of the post-revolutionary educational and land reform projects. These readings, as I will argue, reveal an interesting history of the state’s relationship with the rural peasantry. Reading Rivera’s mural *El reparto de tierras* (1924) alongside *La fórmula secreta* (1965), the experimental film on which Rulfo collaborated with the director Rubén Gámez, the second section of the chapter examines how both artists conceptualise the campesinado as a political entity in light of the Christianised rhetoric of post-revolutionary *agrarismo*. Before undertaking this analysis, the first part of the chapter positions Rivera and Rulfo at endpoints of a spectrum of evolving visual and textual representations of the campesino mass and the federal teacher from the mid-1920s to the early 1950s. In these readings, I explore how Rivera and Rulfo exploit the biblical

⁶ O’Malley, *The Myth of Revolution*, 130.

⁷ Obregón quoted in Narciso Bassols Batalla, *El pensamiento político de Alvaro Obregón* (Mexico City: Ediciones “El Caballito”, 1976), 110.

⁸ See O’Malley, *The Myth of Revolution* and Bantjes, “Saints, Sinners and State Formation”.

metaphors of light and sowing to convey the peasantry's receptiveness or resistance to the state's civilising intervention in the countryside. Although they have never previously been identified or analysed, these metaphors were integral to post-revolutionary discourses of educational reform. Using previously unexamined archival materials, I examine a selection of Rivera's state-commissioned illustrations from the late 1920s alongside the textual and iconographic content of the SEP's contemporary rural publications to demonstrate how they mobilise these biblical metaphors to portray collective campesino bodies as a landscape to be cultivated or a dark space to be illuminated by revolutionary ideology. Turning to Rulfo's fictional account of the experiences of a post-revolutionary rural educator in the short story "Luvina", I explore how the writer grotesquely reconfigures the same metaphors through his physical descriptions of the peasantry and the *maestro* to illustrate the failure of the state's enlightening mission.

Part I: Enlightening and Cultivating the Peasantry: The Socialist Education Campaign

As ideologues focused on education as a crucial site for the dissemination of revolutionary ideology, the traditionally religious sphere of the classroom became a key battlefield in which the state waged its modernising war against the Catholic Church during the 1920s and 1930s. Although the revolution was hailed as a moment of profound societal transformation in its immediate aftermath, widespread illiteracy prevented Mexico from taking its place alongside the world's modern nations.⁹ Rejecting the Porfirian emphasis on scientific learning, the *ateneístas* considered the cultural and aesthetic enlightenment of the masses to be an integral

⁹ Two thirds of Mexico's population was illiterate in 1920. Elizabeth A. Marchant, *Critical Acts: Latin American Women and Cultural Criticism* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 82.

aspect of Mexico's revolutionary spiritual transformation. As Pedro Henríquez Ureña declared in 1924:

Para el pueblo, en fin, la Revolución ha sido una transformación espiritual. No es sólo que se le brinden mayores oportunidades de educarse, es que el pueblo ha descubierto que posee derechos, y entre ellos el derecho de educarse [...] ha comenzado a brillar una luz de esperanza.¹⁰

The civilising discourses of the Ateneo translated into official educational policy during Vasconcelos's term at the SEP, which saw the construction of over one thousand schools and the implementation of a radical new curriculum. Modelling his educational campaign on that of the People's Commissar for Enlightenment Anatoli Lunacharsky, Vasconcelos organised literary gatherings and disseminated thousands of free copies of 'classic' works by Plato, Dante and Tolstoy.¹¹ Vasconcelos also followed Lunacharsky in using Christian terminology to articulate his didactic vision.¹² Speaking in 1920, Vasconcelos hailed the Ministry's federal educators as 'los iniciadores de una cruzada de educación pública, los inspiradores de un entusiasmo cultural semejante al fervor que ayer ponía nuestra raza en las empresas de la religión y la conquista'.¹³ His call for teachers to join the Ministry's 'santa cruzada contra la ignorancia' captured the public imagination and by 1923, 690 so-called rural 'missionaries' had been dispatched to the countryside to preach the SEP's modernising message. Vasconcelos's emphasis on the redemptive power of public education validated state intervention in the countryside by presenting the rural school as the peasantry's only means of liberation from a life of ignorance and poverty.

¹⁰ Henríquez Ureña, "La influencia de la Revolución en la vida intelectual de México", in *Ensayos*, 40.

¹¹ Luis A. Marentes, *José Vasconcelos and the Writing of the Mexican Revolution* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 13.

¹² Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 102.

¹³ José Vasconcelos, "Discurso en la Universidad (Con motivo de la toma de posesión del cargo de rector)", in *Obras completas*, vol.2 (Mexico City: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1958), 775.

'Sembradores de la ciencia': Socialist Educators and the Peasantry in the 1930s

As educational policy entered its socialist phase in the 1930s, reformers stressed the importance of scientific knowledge and hygiene in transforming the deficient peasant into a fully formed entity. In its emphasis on collective progress and self-improvement, post-revolutionary socialist education again drew on nineteenth-century models. Following the secular educational vision of his liberal predecessor Gabino Barreda, Porfirian *científico* Justo Sierra approached education from a Spencerian evolutionary perspective, stressing its function in developing individuals within a society. Instrumental in the development of the socialist school of the 1930s was Vasconcelos's successor at the SEP, Narciso Bassols, who claimed that the 'finalidad más trascendente' of the rural school was to 'crear, multiplicar y robustecer mejores tipos humanos'.¹⁴ Like many contemporary reformers, Bassols considered popular religion a threat to public health: religious festivals were seen to promote alcoholism, venereal disease was blamed on a lack of access to sex education and poor hygiene was attributed to the use of traditional medicines and therapies, predominantly by rural women.¹⁵ During the 1930s the socialist classroom thus became an ideological battleground in which state educators struggled against the church, not only for the hearts and minds of rural Mexicans, but also for their bodies.

Evolving from the Vasconcelian model of the *maestro misionero*, the iconography and metaphoric language of the SEP's rural educational publications of the 1930s portrayed

¹⁴ Quoted in Palacios, *La pluma y el arado*, 42.

¹⁵ Rivera shared this view of religion: 'considero la religión una forma de neurosis colectiva. No soy enemigo de los católicos, así como no soy enemigo de los tuberculosos, los miopes o los paráliticos'. Quoted in Raquel Tibol, *Diego Rivera, luces y sombras* (Barcelona: Lumen, 2007), 239. In line with the post-revolutionary discourses on motherhood discussed in Chapter Three, rural women were specifically targeted by public health policy-makers to improve nutrition and hygiene levels within families. Margarita Velázquez *Políticas sociales, transformación agraria y participación de las mujeres en el campo: 1920-1988* (Cuernavaca: UNAM, 1992), 42.

federal educators as divine messengers of scientific knowledge. The most significant of the SEP's magazines was the bimonthly *El Maestro Rural (MR)*, first published in 1932 under the editorial direction of Salvador Novo.¹⁶ Aimed at rural teachers and peasants who had reaped the benefits of the state's literacy initiatives, the publication looked to establish a direct channel of communication between state-affiliated intellectuals, teachers and the campesinado. Alongside articles on modern farming techniques and basic lessons in hygiene and symptomatology, a number of poems and articles published in the newspaper present the rural teacher as a Christ-like figure who redeems the rural masses by disseminating knowledge of modern science and technology. While poems such as "Himno a las comunidades infantiles escolares" and "Los apóstoles modernos" praise the work of these 'incansables sembradores de la ciencia' shining the light of reason upon Mexico's 'pueblos más tristes y más muertos', hygiene guidelines imparted by federal educators are presented as "Los doce mandamientos de la higiene".¹⁷

Visual Metaphors of Enlightenment in Rivera's Illustrations

Educational publications such as *MR* enjoyed a strong iconographic component thanks to contributions from prominent post-revolutionary visual artists such as Leopoldo Méndez, Fermín Revueltas and Ezequiel Negrete. Although somewhat eclipsed by his career as a muralist, Rivera was also a prolific illustrator, producing hundreds of images for government-funded textbooks and pamphlets and countless magazines including *MR*, *El Maestro*, *El*

¹⁶ Novo was a member of the *Contemporáneos*, a literary group whose cosmopolitan and internationalist literary aesthetic countered the virile masculinity of the official national culture embodied by the muralists.

¹⁷ Prof. J. Lamberto Moreno, "Himno a las comunidades infantiles escolares", *MR*, November 15, 1935, 58-59; "Los apóstoles modernos", *MR*, October 15, 1932, 23; "Maestros distinguidos de Oaxaca: Los doce mandamientos de la higiene", *MR*, December 15, 1935, 27.

libertador, *El Bonete*, *El Sembrador*, *Crisol*, *Revista de Revistas*, *Azulejos* and the periodical *Mexican Folkways*, edited by Frances Toor. Rivera's largest, but almost completely unknown, illustration commission was to decorate the published proceedings of the conventions held by the Liga de Comunidades Agrarias y Sindicatos Campesinos in the state of Tamaulipas between 1926 and 1928. Founded in 1926 by the Governor of Tamaulipas Emilio Portes Gil and the agronomist Marte R. Gómez, the conventions assembled delegates from across the state to discuss the progress of agrarian and educational reform in their respective communities. Gómez, who had previously commissioned his Chapingo fresco cycle, invited Rivera to illustrate the convention's proceedings to make the printed text more accessible to its semi-literate campesino readership.¹⁸ Rivera attended the annual conventions between 1926 and 1928 and produced 133 images to illustrate the three printed volumes. Despite the apparent simplicity of their style and composition, closer examination of these illustrations reveals how they draw from a complex network of biblical images to visually communicate the religious metaphors embedded in the text.

Although an active supporter of the government's post-revolutionary defanaticisation campaign, religion played a formative role in Rivera's early life. His mother, María del Pilar Barrientos, was a strict Catholic who enrolled her son in a string of Catholic schools. However, as with many of his aspects of Rivera's public persona, his faith remained ambiguous. After a prolonged period of atheism, Rivera erased the words 'Dios no existe' from his mural at the Hotel del Prado in 1956 and unexpectedly declared himself Catholic. Rivera's immersion in Renaissance Christian art as a student in Italy during the early 1920s provided him with a rich

¹⁸ Marte R. Gómez, "Marte R. Gómez, agrarista", interview by James W. Wilkie, in *Mexico visto en el siglo XX*, eds. James W. Wilkie and Edna Monzón de Wilkie (Mexico City: Instituto Mexicano de Investigaciones Económicas, 1969), 89.

source of scriptural metaphors and iconographic motifs that would continue to inform his visual language over the subsequent decades. This influence is strikingly revealed in an illustration produced by the artist for the proceedings of the League's 1928 conference (fig.4.1). Here, he incorporates biblical metaphors of light to portray the rural teacher as a Christ-like embodiment of the Word of the Revolution. The accompanying report from the delegate of San José de Santa Engracia states that:

En el mes de febrero del presente año se fundaron las Escuelas para Niños y para Adultos en la Ranchería de "Las Enramadas", de nuestro ejido, en un local que ha venido adaptándose con fondos de los ejidatorios de ese lugar [...] La escuela cuenta con su lámpara de gasolina y a ella están asistiendo casi todos los ejidatarios del lugar.¹⁹

Although the text simply describes the installation of an electric light in the local school, Rivera's illustration converts the lamp into a divine symbol of revolutionary enlightenment. Positioned above the written report, the illustration portrays a rural teacher seated before an open book as he addresses a group of campesinos whose bodies are engulfed by beams of light radiating from an oversized lamp overhead. The elevated position of the teacher and his refined features, in contrast to the dishevelled appearance of the peasant mass below, clearly illustrates his moral superiority and embodiment of the state's civilising values. The posture of the *maestro* is strikingly reminiscent of early Christian depictions of Christ, where the codex in his left hand serves to symbol the written dogma of God, while his raised right hand denotes the spoken word of God.²⁰ Rivera's appropriation of this speech gesture and inclusion of the open book, a common symbol of the Bible, directly substitutes Christ as the imparter

¹⁹ "Informe del Delegado del Ejido de San José de Santa Engracia", in *Tercera convención de la Liga de Comunidades Agrarias y Sindicatos Campesinos del Estado de Tamaulipas*, ed. Marte R. Gómez (Mexico City: Editorial Cultura, 1928),180.

²⁰ Dimitri Hazzikostas, "Arms Raised", in *Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography: Themes Depicted in Works of Art*, ed. Helene E Roberts (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998), 54.

of God's wisdom with the rural teacher as the interpreter of revolutionary ideology. Many of these features were already established components of Soviet socialist iconography. In visual propaganda promoting the regime's literacy campaigns, such as this poster from 1921 (fig.4.2), where the inclusion of the open book and the figure addressing the crowd from a pulpit serve to conflate religious and revolutionary instruction. Points of comparison can be also drawn with Andrey Sokolov's poster *Let the Ruling Classes Shudder* (1922) (fig.4.3), where Lenin is enveloped by the stylised rays of a rising sun as he raises his hand in a sign of benediction. As Bonnell notes, the positioning of the worker and peasant on either side of him recalls standard depictions of Christ and his apostles.²¹

Light imagery is equally integral to Rivera's image, where it is closely interlinked with the function of the gaze. While the teacher looks upward towards the lamp, suggesting a divine inspiration for his words, the eyes of the peasants are fixed upon his face. Their slight upward gaze and the elevated position of the teacher echoes the compositional structure of Renaissance depictions of Christ and his followers such as Giotto's and Pietro Perugino's interpretations of *The Ascension of Christ*, which portray Christ levitating above the awe-struck apostles (figs.4.4-4.5). This interplay of gazes and the prominence of the lamp suggests links with scriptural references to Jesus as a light-bringer. A powerful symbolic bond between light, sight and knowledge is established in the Gospel of John, where the ability to physically see Jesus is equated with the perception of God's wisdom. This dualistic system based on the concepts of light and darkness, blindness and sight provides the framework for numerous biblical images that convey Christ's power to 'enlighten the eyes' of his followers. The lamp is particularly significant within this symbolic network as it represents the word of God

²¹ Bonnell, *Iconography of Power*, 146.

illuminating the path to redemption (Psalm 119:105) and the human eye as the point of entry for divine light into the body (Luke 11:34).²² These concepts of sight, knowledge and salvation are visually intertwined in Rivera's illustration where vision is directly linked to intellectual and political illumination. The direction of the peasants' gaze towards the teacher and their illumination by the lamp's radiance suggest that they have achieved redemption by successfully absorbing the light of revolutionary ideology.

The analogy between light and revolutionary education established in Rivera's illustration recurs throughout the convention's published proceedings. Recalling the biblical metaphor of the path to enlightenment in Psalm 119:105, Portes Gil praises the 'entusiastas pregoneros' carrying out the state's educational mission and claims that their teachings 'serán la luz que os abrirá el sendero'.²³ Similar metaphors are employed by Magdaleno Aguilar, the League's secretary, who insists on the need to 'llevar la luz a las conciencias', and by its director Miguel Martínez Rojo, who praises the educators for redeeming the 'oscuros campesinos' by introducing them to 'la luz de la ciencia'.²⁴ Textual and visual images linking revolutionary education with light also recur throughout *MR*. Echoing the cover image of the April 1933 edition, which depicts a lamp shining onto an open book and a collection of farming tools (fig.4.6), educator Francisco Monterde writing in the September issue predicts that state-approved textbooks will 'alumbrar un poco las tinieblas en que han vivido sus

²² Numerous other biblical images link physical sight with the perception of divine wisdom. See Prov. 29:13, Ps. 19:8.

²³ Emilio Portes Gil, "Discurso pronunciado por el señor lic. Emilio Portes Gil, gobernador constitucional del estado de Tamaulipas y apertura de los trabajos de la convención", in *Primera convención de la Liga de Comunidades Agrarias y Sindicatos Campesinos*, ed. Marte R. Gómez (Mexico City: Editorial Cultura, 1926), 74, 75.

²⁴ Magdaleno Aguilar, "Discurso pronunciado por el Señor Magdaleno Aguilar", in *Segunda convención de la Liga de Comunidades Agrarias y Sindicatos Campesinos*, ed. Marte R. Gómez (Mexico City: Editorial Cultura, 1927), 88; Miguel Martínez Rojo, "Discurso pronunciado por el C. Miguel Martínez Rojo", in *Segunda convención*, 332.

hermanos del campo'.²⁵ Light symbolism is again used to present the rural school as a beacon of hope in the countryside in the "Canto escolar campesino" (January 1933), which compares the 'escuelita campesina levantada en la montaña' to 'un faro que ilumina de la noche a la mañana'.²⁶

Like Rivera, Álvaro Yunque appears to draw on the imagery of Luke 11:34 in his poem "Sé como este farol", published in May 1932, which uses the symbol of the lamp to describe the internalisation of the school's ideas within the mind of the peasant. Flanked by the images of two beaming lamps (fig.4.7), the poem likens the head of the campesino to a lantern that has been illuminated by knowledge:

Útil, vencido sombras yergue
Su testa de cristal;
Y en su interior, como una idea,
Lirio hecho luz, brillando está.
¡Erguido y útil! ... ¿Quién me grita
"sé como este faról"?
¡"Sé un cristal límpido por fuera
Y haya una luz en tu interior"!²⁷

The Rural Teacher as "Sembrador": Cultivating the Peasantry

Like Rivera's illustration, these visual and poetic images draw on the notion of divine radiance to describe the transmission of revolutionary ideology from the teacher to the peasant community. Alongside this metaphor, the most common scriptural motif in educational discourses of the 1920s and '30s was the parable of the sower, taken from the Gospel of Matthew, which describes the transmission of divine wisdom in agricultural terms by presenting Christ as a sower who plants the seed of the Word in the human heart.²⁸

²⁵ Francisco Monterde, "Libros para los campesinos", *MR*, September 1, 1933, 3-4.

²⁶ Concepción Pérez, "Canto escolar campesino", *MR*, January 15, 1933, 3.

²⁷ Álvaro Yunque, "Sé como este farol", *MR*, May 1, 1932, 17.

²⁸ Mt. 13:14-15.

Exploiting its universal accessibility to an agrarian audience, post-revolutionary educators appropriated this parable to explain the redemptive work of the federal teacher. Although its recurrence has never previously been noted, the sower motif features prominently in government-approved textbooks of the 1920s and 1930s, inspiring the titles of readers including the fortnightly *El sembrador* (founded in 1929) and the textbook *Simiente* (1935) which was distributed as part of the Cardenista literacy campaign. The metaphor is also profoundly interwoven into the iconographic and textual content of the SEP's rural newspapers. The image of a sower or disembodied hand scattering seeds adorns several covers of *El sembrador* (figs.4.8-4.9) and a number of poems published in *MR* present the rural teacher as a sower of scientific knowledge in the countryside. The anonymous poet of "Los apóstoles modernos", for example, hails Mexico's rural educators as 'sembradores incansables (de) todo germen de progreso', while in Ángel Cifuentes's poem "El Maestro Rural" the heroic teacher scatters 'grains' symbolising 'La letra' which liberate the peasants from the forces of 'negro fanatismo'.²⁹ In several of the poems published in *MR*, the pedagogical metaphor of the sower establishes an implicit comparison between the land and collective bodies of the peasantry. Maintaining the parable's harvesting metaphor, these works envision the imagined fruits of the teacher's labour by comparing the peasants' bodies to thriving crops. One writer praises the teacher who is 'honrado y amoroso con los niños para que fructifiquen como esas tiernas y solitarias espigas que quedan aisladas en el barranco', while collective peasant bodies are again compared to cultivated crops in the poem "El Maíz",

²⁹ "Los apóstoles modernos", *MR*, October 15, 1932, 23; Ángel Cifuentes; "El Maestro Rural", *MR*, May/June, 1940, 18.

where grains of corn are likened to the pearly white teeth of smiling peasants, who are ‘llenos de una bendición’.³⁰

Rivera integrates the parable of the sower into his illustrations for both the League’s published proceedings and the children’s reader *Fermín Lee*, which was published by the SEP in 1928. The opening illustration for the third session of the 1926 convention depicts a man striding across a ploughed field, scattering seeds from a satchel that is slung across his waist (fig.4.10). Although the sower’s face is concealed from the viewer, imbuing him with an almost mystical aura, his traditional peasant clothing, *sombrero* and ammunition belt clearly codify him as a rural revolutionary. While the sower casts a handful of seeds that fall in an arc across the centre of the image, another man in almost identical clothing appears to be inspecting the terrain further along the field. Although Rivera provides no title for this illustration, its iconographic similarities with earlier visual representations of this parable reveal its biblical source. Consistent with the pictorial scheme used by nineteenth-century artists such as Vincent Van Gogh and Sir John Everett Millais (figs.4.11-4.12), Rivera depicts the sower scattering seeds with his right hand, again denoting divine righteousness, as a bird threatens to intercept them. This religious image once again correlates with the accounts of educational reform in the published proceedings, where the parable is used to describe the successful fertilisation of the peasants’ hearts by revolutionary education. Portes Gil calls for:

(una) escuela del corazón que hace nacer en el espíritu un alto sentimiento de fraternidad humana. Deseamos sembrar en cada corazón de tamaulipeco la simiente de la escuela moderna que rompe los moldes de la sociedad opresora del capitalismo.³¹

³⁰ “Cursos para correspondencia – organización escolar a cargo del Profesor Felipe de J. Espinosa, Lección 18: Horarios”, *MR*, May 15, 1932, 29; Wenceslao Rodríguez, “El maíz”, *MR*, December 1, 1932, 10.

³¹ Portes Gil, “Discurso pronunciado”, in *Primera convención*, 74.

The sowing metaphor is employed again by Aguilar, who establishes a direct parallel between the cultivation of the land and that of rural minds:

Debemos seguir demostrando con hechos que cuanto ha hecho la Revolución por los humildes para sacarnos de las garras de los terratenientes es justo y que lo hemos sabido comprender, dedicándonos empeñosamente al cultivo de nuestras parcelas y al cultivo de nuestras inteligencias.³²

Rivera again incorporates the parable into one of his illustrations for Manuel Velázquez Andrade's primary school textbook *Fermín*, first published by the SEP 1929 (fig.4.13). The book was selected by the Calles administration to front its rural literacy campaign, which sought to dissociate literacy from religion by promoting reading as a modern and nationalist exercise.³³ Adhering to the SEP's official narrative of the revolution as a popular agrarian movement, the text follows the story of Fermín, the son of a hacienda labourer, who grows up during the conflict's armed phase and comes to embody the revolutionary values of hard work, sobriety and patriotism. Andrade highlights Fermín's role as a citizenship model for the post-revolutionary child in the book's prologue where he is presented as a symbol of the revolution's past, present and future. Rivera's illustration of the sower, inserted mid-way through the book, can thus be read as a visual metaphor for the text itself in its efforts to cultivate a revolutionary consciousness in young readers. Employing the same minimalist composition as the previous drawing, Rivera portrays a man dressed in traditional peasant clothing with his back turned to the viewer as he strides across a freshly ploughed field. Once again, the sower's right hand scatters the seeds which fall in an arc over a diving bird. While

³² Magdaleno Aguilar, "Discurso pronunciado", 88. Rivera reinforces this metaphor in several of his other illustrations for the proceedings by positioning scenes of socialist education and agricultural cultivation side by side (fig.4.14 - 4.15)

³³ Melanie Huska, "Historically Themed Comic Books as Civic Education in 1980s Mexico", in *Comics as History, Comics as Literature: Roles of the Comic Book in Scholarship, Society, and Entertainment*, ed. Annessa Ann Babic (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2013), 67.

Rivera's illustration is largely consistent with earlier interpretations of the parable, he diverges from the iconographic tradition by including a second man to the right of the image who spurs two oxen with a plough. As ploughing is not an explicit image in the biblical parable, based on the notion that hearers of the Gospel are free to receive or reject the Word of God, this modification is significant. In the Old Testament, the metaphor of the plough expresses the act of softening one's own heart to receive the Word of God, as seen in Christ's plea to his listeners in Jeremiah 4:3 to 'Plough up the hard ground of your hearts'.³⁴ As the softened terrain of the heart will inevitably receive the seeds of divine knowledge, Rivera's inclusion of the plough predetermines a successful outcome for the parable.

By the 1940s, such bucolic metaphors of the peasantry flourishing under state cultivation jarred with the stark realities of the state's rural educational campaign. From the outset, the project struggled to bridge the vast cultural and ideological differences between educators and students. As most federal teachers hailed from urban backgrounds, they were often ignorant of local conditions and struggled to effectively communicate with the peasants, whom they viewed as atavistic and degenerate. They were also severely underqualified to act as modernising agents in the countryside. Although rural *maestros* were expected to perform the duties of educator, physician and agronomist, only half had completed their primary education.³⁵ Regional responses varied, however, educators were generally greeted with a suspicious or hostile response from locals who viewed schooling as a disruption to their work routines and resented state-imposed norms relating to fanaticism, recreation and hygiene. As Butler notes, in the 1920s peasants often refused to attend the schools, feigned ignorance of

³⁴ Jer. 4:3; Hos. 10:12.

³⁵ Engracia Loyo, "La educación del pueblo", in *Historia mínima de la educación en México*, ed. Dorothy Tanck de Estrada (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2010), 167.

the revolution or intentionally flaunted their ‘defiantly Catholic, “unrevolutionary” culture’.³⁶ The enforcement of secular education provoked significant, often armed resistance during the 1920s, fomenting a tense atmosphere that ultimately culminated in 1926 in the eruption of the Cristero war between the state and rebel Catholic groups. During this chaotic and bloody confrontation, federal repression of the rebels stirred *cristero* sympathies in certain communities who retaliated by driving out SEP teachers. Rural hostility towards federal educators persisted during the more aggressively anti-clerical decade of the 1930s in the form of assaults, kidnappings and murders.³⁷ Faced with strenuous popular opposition, socialist education was in full retreat by the 1940s.

The *Maestro Rural* as Failed Sower in Rulfo’s “Luvina”

Growing up during the Cristero revolt in Jalisco, a focal point of the conflict, Rulfo witnessed first-hand the violent peasant response to the state’s anticlerical restrictions and secular education programme. He was personally traumatised by the conflict, which claimed the lives of both his father and uncle. As a result, he was highly critical of its reactionary fanatical leaders.³⁸ Religion played an influential role in Rulfo’s early education. The writer entered the Orfanatorio Luis Silva in 1927 and spent two years in the Seminario Conciliar el Señor San José from 1933 to 1935 at the encouragement of his grandmother, who believed he would

³⁶ Matthew Butler, *Popular Piety and Political Identity in Mexico’s Cristero Rebellion: Michoacán, 1927-29* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2004), 90.

³⁷ Raby identifies 139 incidents of violence or threats of violence against rural teachers from 1931 to 1940. David L. Raby, “Los maestros rurales y los conflictos sociales en México (1931-1940)”, *Historia Mexicana* 18, no.2 (October-December 1968): 191. To mark this wave of violence, the SEP commissioned the artist Leopoldo Méndez to produce a portfolio of seven lithographs entitled “En Nombre De Cristo: Han Asesinado Más De 200 Maestros” (1939) (fig.4.16).

³⁸ Rulfo described pro-Cristero communities as ‘pueblos muy reaccionarios, pueblos con ideas muy conservadoras, fanáticos’. Quoted in Luis Harss, *Los nuestros* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1969), 308.

make a good priest.³⁹ Although Rulfo subsequently rejected Catholicism, his early exposure to religion exerted a lasting influence on his artistic imagination.⁴⁰ In his fictional account of the post-revolutionary educational programme in the short story “Luvina”, Rulfo reconfigures the metaphors of light and sowing in his physical descriptions of the teacher and the peasants to portray the failure of the state’s enlightening mission. While the dull and deficient eyes of Luvina’s inhabitants indicate their failure to assimilate the teacher’s words, parallels between their diseased bodies and the decay of the natural landscape invert the pedagogical metaphor of the sower, illustrating their resistance to the state’s modernising message.

The story is based around the first-person monologue of an anonymous former rural teacher who relates his harrowing experience working in the village of San Juan Luvina to a mute interlocutor in an unidentified bar. “Luvina” can be situated alongside other bleak literary portraits of the rural teacher from the late 1930s onwards, such as Enrique Othón Díaz’s *S.F.Z.-33 Escuela* (1937), Mauricio Magdaleno’s *El resplandor* (1937), Martín Luis Guzmán’s story “Maestros rurales” (1938) and Revueltas’s *Dios en la tierra* (1944). While Guzmán’s fictional autobiographical account describes the difficulties of a young teacher working in the Yucatán village of Kinchil, Magdaleno’s and Revueltas’s novels describe the more violent fates of rural educators who are respectively poisoned and impaled by local communities. The crucifixion of the federal teacher by the local community in *Dios en la tierra* reveals a penchant for inverted biblical imagery common to both Revueltas’s and Rulfo’s works.

³⁹ Boldy *A Companion to Juan Rulfo*, 10-11.

⁴⁰ Rulfo stated: ‘Nosotros somos bautizados, hemos ido a la Iglesia, hemos hecho la primera comunión, hemos practicado la religión hasta cierta edad [...] pues no, no nos llevan a ninguna parte y, entonces, hemos abandonado bastante la cosa del catolicismo’. Quoted in Roberto García Bonilla, *Un tiempo suspendido: cronología de la vida y la obra de Juan Rulfo* (Mexico City: CONACULTA, 2008), 81.

While Rulfo's *maestro* escapes from Luvina alive, his contact with the villagers results in his profound physical and spiritual deterioration: 'Allá dejé la vida [...] Fui a ese lugar con mis ilusiones cabales y volví viejo y acabado' (126). The obsessive rambling thoughts of the increasingly inebriated *maestro* create an oppressive narrative atmosphere that is only intermittently punctuated by the lyrical descriptions of the omniscient narrator. He admits that his memory is fading due to a persistent fever and his companion's unbroken silence strongly suggests that he is in fact the product of a hallucination.⁴¹ Although the name Luvina initially conjured a heavenly image in his mind, the teacher recalls how he encountered a 'lugar endemoniado' and subsequently concludes that 'aquello es el purgatorio' (127, 132).⁴² These terms highlight a powerful biblical element to this story which, as I will illustrate, can be read as a grotesque rewriting of the parable of the sower. My interpretation builds on Thakkar's analysis of the story, which notes the shared recalcitrance of the landscape and the peasantry but does not identify the parabolic significance of the comparison.⁴³ As we have seen, in the biblical parable, the fertile soil in which the seed successfully germinates represents the hearts and minds of those willing to receive the Word of God. I argue that this central metaphorical equation between the human and the organic is maintained but inverted in "Luvina", where Rulfo conflates the decaying bodies of the *luvinenses* with the degenerating landscape to illustrate their resistance to the state's modernising project.

Inspired by the messianic rhetoric of the SEP, Rulfo's teacher arrives in Luvina 'cargado de ideas', but discovers a human wasteland beyond all hope of revolutionary

⁴¹ Despite the teacher's encouragement his interlocutor never drinks his beer ('Pero tómese su cerveza. Veo que no le ha dado ni siquiera una probadita. Tómesela', 126.)

⁴² 'San Juan Luvina. Me sonaba a nombre de cielo aquel nombre' (132). In a footnote, Thakkar links the name Luvina to the phrase 'Luz Divina'. Thakkar, *The Fiction of Juan Rulfo*, 76.

⁴³ Thakkar, *The Fiction of Juan Rulfo*, 77.

salvation. Suffocated by a deadening silence and suspended in an eternal, unmoving present, the seemingly lifeless village is inhabited by an ageing and fervently superstitious population. The locals refuse to abandon their dead and the shrouded women wandering the streets in mourning embody the ‘negro fanatismo’ alluded to in Cifuentes’s poem in *MR*.

While these human conditions are evidently unfavourable to state intervention, the futility of the teacher’s attempts to sow the Word of the Revolution in this environment is already signalled in his opening description of Luvina’s depleted landscape. Although the phonic qualities of the name Luvina – evoking the Spanish words ‘luz’, ‘lluvia’ and ‘llovizna’ – suggest ideal conditions for natural growth, we learn that the land has been rendered sterile by a violent ash-filled wind that uproots vegetation from the hillside and casts it into darkness. Sparsely populated by withering flowers and skeletal branches, these lands are, as Jiménez de Báez notes, already ‘sembradas de muerte y desolación’.⁴⁴ Composed of rocks and thorn-like mounds of earth, the infertile landscape of Luvina closely resembles the unreceptive forms of soil described in the parable. Overlooked by the ‘Cuesta de la Piedra Cruda’, the elevated terrain of Luvina is plagued by rocks (123) and an ongoing drought has caused the parched earth to form clods that cut into human feet as if it had grown thorns (125). Although the dawn momentarily promises sunlight and dew that would moisten the earth, the droplets freeze before they reach the soil: ‘en Luvina los días son tan fríos como las noches y el rocío se cuaja en el cielo antes que llegue a caer sobre la tierra’ (123). The teacher’s use of the verb *cuajar* here and again in the story’s closing lines to describe his aborted mission in Luvina directly links his incapacity to educate the peasants with the impossibility of increasing the land’s fertility (‘Estaba cargado de ideas [...] Pero en Luvina no cuajó eso. Hice el experimento y se

⁴⁴ Yvette Jiménez de Báez, *Juan Rulfo, del Páramo a la esperanza: una lectura crítica de su obra* (Mexico City: Colegio de México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1990), 109.

deshizo',132). The grim atmosphere and inverted biblical imagery of "Luvina" directly prefigures those of Rulfo's novel, in which Padre Rentería notably evokes the parable to describe his failed spiritual mission in Comala: 'Yo traje aquí algunas semillas. Pocas; apenas una bolsita [...] después pensé que hubiera sido mejor dejarlas allá donde maduraran, ya que aquí las traje a morir' (260).

The symbolic bond between the peasants' bodies and their natural environment is strengthened by the manner in which human disease permeates Luvina's landscape. The arid terrain is likened to hardened skin, the hills are compared to corpses and the sky is discoloured by a grey stain that stretches across the horizon. Luvina's natural decay is mirrored in the physiological deterioration of its malnourished inhabitants. The teacher is haunted by the emaciated forms and toothless mouths of the villagers who swallow their own saliva to calm their hunger (131).⁴⁵ If, as Boldy asserts, this story is set in the Cárdenas era, these lingering descriptions of the peasants' diseased bodies capture the medicalised gaze of the rural teacher during this hygiene-oriented phase of socialist education in the 1930s.⁴⁶ The suggestion that, like the hardened landscape, the peasants' bodies are resistant to cultivation is confirmed in the subsequent description of their eyes. The teacher's exhortation to the villagers to move to arable lands with the assistance of the government, a probable allusion to the Cárdenista *ejido* system, is greeted with blank expressions: 'Ellos me oyeron, sin parpadear, mirándome desde el fondo de sus ojos, de los que sólo se asomaba una lucecita allá muy adentro' (131).⁴⁷ Like the impermeable landscape, whose perpetual sterility is indicated by the repetition of the

⁴⁵ 'Los mirará pasar como sombras, repegados al muro de las casas, casi arrastrados por el viento' (131). 'Y mujeres sin fuerzas, casi trabadas de tan flacas' (130).

⁴⁶ Boldy, *A Companion to Juan Rulfo*, 38. The regular hygiene bulletins in *El Maestro Rural* indicate that rural teachers frequently acted as community physicians and dentists. Dr Ernesto Leon Nogueira, "Orientación de higiene rural un programa de salud dental en el medio rural", *MR*, May-June, 1940, 13.

⁴⁷ The term *ejido* refers to an area of land farmed communally under a state-supported system. This initiative is discussed in greater detail in the second part of this chapter.

adverbs ‘nunca’ and ‘siempre’, the unblinking eyes of the peasants are defined by an impenetrable and immutable quality. Recalling those represented by the infertile soil in the Matthean parable, they hear and see the teacher but evidently fail to comprehend his words.⁴⁸ The comparison of the heart’s inability to receive the seed to a state of visual impairment in the parable is significant in relation to the dull glow in the eyes of the villagers. Unlike Rivera’s campesinos, whose bodies are collectively enveloped in the glow of the lamp as they gaze up at the rural teacher, Rulfo’s *maestro* detects only a distant glimmer in the eyes of the peasants staring back at him. Recalling the metaphorical link between blindness and spiritual darkness in John’s Gospel, the evident failure of his enlightening words to penetrate their minds is further suggested by their resistance to natural light. The teacher describes how the bodies of the female townsfolk merge with ‘el negro fondo de la noche’ while the townsfolk with whom he converses welcome the relentless gale that has prevented sunlight from reaching the village, claiming that it is ‘el mandato de Dios’ (131).

Returning to the present-tense scene of the bar in the story’s closing lines, we discover that, as in the case of “Macario”, analysed in Chapter Two, the intoxicated narrator-protagonist has not moved for the duration of his monologue and that the text has assumed a circular form that negates all possibility of narrative progress. The teacher gradually falls silent and relinquishes narrative control to the omniscient narrator who describes the babbling sounds of the river outside the bar and the gradual onset of dusk. As night begins to fall, both the body and mind of the teacher are engulfed in darkness as he slumps unconscious onto the table. Light imagery remains a strong symbolic element in this closing section. Intermittently throughout the story, the omniscient narrator refers to a gas lamp suspended above the

⁴⁸ Mt. 13:13.

teacher's head. Although this literary image strikingly recalls Rivera's earlier illustration of the rural teacher, the lamp is here used for very different symbolic purposes. As the teacher delivers his monologue, termites repeatedly fly towards the light and scorch their wings, forming a pile of 'gusanitos desnudos' on the table before him (132). The closing images of these mutilated insects who have been fatally attracted to the lamp's glow mirror the ravaged body of the *maestro* himself, whose seduction by the state's enlightening mission has ultimately led to his downfall.

Drawing on common biblical vocabularies, Rivera's and Rulfo's narratives of educational reform trace the imagined construction and collapse of the post-revolutionary teacher as a revolutionary redeemer of the countryside. Intellectuals and artists of the immediate post-revolution period appropriated scriptural metaphors of divine enlightenment and sowing to describe the successful transmission of revolutionary ideology from the teacher to the rural masses. However, in reality, teachers often struggled to impose the state's modern values on campesino communities and were forced to adapt to local ways of life. Discussing rural educators in the 1930s, Palacios notes that 'los que trabajaban en el campo comenzaron a realizar una acción simbiótica con los objetos de su acción y a convertirse ellos mismos en seres tan miserables y necesitados del amparo del Estado Revolucionario como los propios campesinos'.⁴⁹ The unidirectional flow of influence implied in Rivera's metaphors of enlightenment and sowing is reversed in Rulfo's story where the teacher has not only failed to disseminate the state's modernising ideology in Luvina but has become infected through his interaction with the villagers and acquired other symptoms of rural regression such as

⁴⁹ Palacios, *La pluma y el arado*, 43.

inertia and alcoholism. Rather than incorporate Luvina into the modern revolutionary nation, the corrupted body of the teacher has become assimilated into its intransigent community.

By examining Rivera's and Rulfo's works comparatively, this first section of the chapter has shed light on the alternative political uses of biblical imagery in artistic representations of the education reform project. A reading of Rivera's unexamined illustrations, as I have shown, demonstrates how the artist abides by the rhetoric of the state's agendas, providing visual metaphors that uphold the secular *maestro* as a rural redeemer. Moreover, they substantiate contemporary intellectual interpretations of the peasantry as inherently deficient and passive by conceptualising their minds and bodies as empty landscapes primed for ideological fertilisation or dark voids to be filled with the light of rationality. By the 1950s, the outlook on this educational agenda is starkly different. Rulfo's bleak parable – a portrayal of the peasantry's active resistance to the state's civilising crusade – offers a radical reconfiguration and dismissal of the biblical narratives presented in Mexican government propaganda.

Part II: Crowd Control: Corporatism, Land Reform and the Campesino Collective

Alongside education, agrarian reform constituted the other key pillar of the state's post-revolutionary rural development campaign. Eager to forge an alliance with the peasantry after a protracted agrarian revolution, Obregón pursued rural reform through the ejido system, a communal landholding scheme incorporating all farming communities into a single state-controlled organisation. While early nation-builders hailed these efforts as the answer to Zapata's cry for 'Tierra y libertad', the pace of distribution was slow and much of the land was uncultivable.⁵⁰ Land distribution further decelerated under Calles, but entered an active phase during the populist administration of Cárdenas, who rejuvenated the ejido as the basis for a socialist 'rural arcadia'.⁵¹

Calles's creation of umbrella organisations for social and political groups during the early 1920s and his establishment of the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR) in 1929 provided the institutional foundations for the creation of a corporatist state under Cárdenas that directly bound the peasantry to the state. In contrast to pluralist systems, corporatist forms of governance subordinate social groups to the state by incorporating them into a centralised and hierarchical state-controlled polity. These groups are rendered dependent on the state through the provision of protection and concessions. In the Mexican context, corporatism provided post-revolutionary governments with a framework for promoting national unification and containing rural unrest. Cárdenas strengthened corporatist bonds between the state and the campesinado through the ejido scheme and the creation of state-controlled organisations such as the Confederación Campesina Mexicana (CCM) in 1933 and the

⁵⁰ Steven E. Sanderson, *Agrarian Populism and the Mexican State: The Struggle for Land in Sonora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 80.

⁵¹ Dan La Botz, *Democracy in Mexico: Peasant Rebellion and Political Reform* (Boston: South End Press, 1995), 96.

Confederación Nacional Campesina (CNC) in 1938, which rendered the peasant community economically reliant on the state and neutralised potentially subversive groups.⁵² Derived from the Latin *corpus*, the corporatist model adopted by the secular Mexican state paradoxically originated in the organicist political metaphors employed by early Catholic theologians. Building on Saint Augustine's comparison of the Christian community to the perfectly unified body of Christ in *De Civitate Dei* (426AD), Thomas Aquinas conceived society as a corporate body of hierarchically arranged social organs operating in the interest of 'the common good' (*bonum commune*). For Aquinas, human redemption could be secured through incorporation into the Body of Christ and by extension, the organic corporate whole of the Catholic church.⁵³ Embedded in the continent's Hispanic-Catholic heritage, corporatism remained a relatively consistent aspect of the Latin American political landscape after the colonial period and flourished in post-revolutionary Mexico following the organic and integrationist, if not strictly corporatist, Porfirian regime.⁵⁴ Particularly in the context of the agrarian project, the Mexican case reflects how Latin American corporatists took inspiration from Aquinas in advocating the use of property for the good of society as a whole and in promoting the principles of hierarchy, order, and the pursuit of the 'common good'.⁵⁵

Underscoring its function as the central arbiter of the national good, Cárdenas described how the PNR, 'como órgano de expresión de las aspiraciones nacionales pugnará por desvanecer los egoísmos' and stated that the nation, 'como todo organismo viviente, debe buscar en un futuro mejor la realización del interés colectivo (y) obtener el fin esencial que

⁵² Gavin O'Toole, *Politics Latin America* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 202.

⁵³ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Sermon-Conferences of St. Thomas Aquinas on the Apostles Creed*, ed. Nicholas Ayo (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 135.

⁵⁴ Howard J. Wiarda, *The Soul of Latin America: The Cultural and Political Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 260-262.

⁵⁵ Howard J. Wiarda, "Corporatist Theory and Ideology: A Latin American Development Paradigm", *Journal of Church and State* 20, no. 1 (1978): 33-34.

consiste en el mejoramiento integral de todos los grupos sociales'.⁵⁶ Although the corporatist state was not consolidated until the 1930s, prominent *agraristas* such as Lombardo Toledano and Portes Gil foreshadowed Cárdenas in using political-theological concepts to promote an attitude of cooperation and deference to the state amongst the campesinado during the 1920s. By adopting a Christian rhetoric of solidarity and comparing land reform to an act of divine justice, reformers encouraged peasant groups to subordinate their interests to the 'national good' and to adopt an attitude of passivity and deference in relation to the government. By the end of the Cárdenas era, however, the top-down authoritarian structure of this model became increasingly apparent. Although organisations such as the CNC ostensibly provided the political infrastructure for addressing rural needs, they prevented peasant groups from evolving into a strong democratising force by binding them to the state.⁵⁷ The 1940s marked what Sanderson describes as an 'anti-campesino shift in agrarian politics', as the Camacho and Alemán administrations abandoned the agrarian project to pursue a developmentalist agenda.⁵⁸ The emaciation of the ejido over the subsequent decades reversed the initial improvements achieved through land reform; by 1970, the number of landless peasants was greater than at the beginning of the Revolution.⁵⁹ Broken government promises led to the emergence of regionally based peasant movements from the late 1940s, with three armed revolts erupting in Morelos alone between 1942 and 1962.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Lázaro Cárdenas, "Discurso del presidente del partido nacional revolucionario sobre el programa de trabajo para el año de 1931", in *Palabras y documentos públicos de Lázaro Cárdenas: 1928-1970*, 99.

⁵⁷ Aguilar Camín and Meyer, *In the Shadow of the Mexican Revolution*, 212.

⁵⁸ Sanderson, *Agrarian Populism and the Mexican State*, 138.

⁵⁹ John M. Hart, "Agrarian Reform", in *Twentieth-Century Mexico*, eds. William H. Beezley and Dirk W. Raat (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 14.

⁶⁰ Tanalís Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata: The Jaramillista Movement and the Myth of the Pax-Príista, 1940–1962* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008)

Tracing a history of aesthetic interpretations of agrarian reform from the 1920s to the mid-1960s, the second part of this chapter examines how Rivera's and Rulfo's works endorse or complicate this corporatist ideal of a docile and deferential campesinado. Analysing Rivera's mural *El reparto de tierras* (1924) alongside *La fórmula secreta* (1965), an experimental short film directed by Rubén Gámez and featuring a poetic monologue by Rulfo, I consider how both artists respectively borrow from Renaissance and baroque aesthetics to visualise the peasant mass as a political entity. During the Renaissance, the rejuvenation of Roman civic virtues and the influence of Thomism shaped a humanist code of civil conduct that emphasised self-sacrificing service to the greater good and the defence of state institutions.⁶¹ The political, religious and intellectual turmoil of the seventeenth century, however, resulted in a crisis of Renaissance values and institutions that reverberated throughout the visual arts. In *The Principles of Art History* (1915), Heinrich Wölfflin describes this artistic transition, from the closed and static order of Renaissance painting, in which individual objects are subjugated to the overall unity and integrity of the composition, to the volatile formlessness of the Baroque, where figures are swept up in a swirl of dynamic motion and shadow that obscures their underlying structures.⁶² While Renaissance composition is bounded by clear organisation and anchored by a central focal point, Wölfflin stresses the open and transformative nature of the Baroque, which pushes outwards in radical new directions.⁶³

⁶¹ Fred S. Kleiner, *Gardner's Art through the Ages: The Western Perspective* (London: Cengage Learning, 2010), 407.

⁶² Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Early Modern Art*, trans. Jonathan Blower (California: Getty Publications, 2015), 83-99.

⁶³ Heinrich Wölfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque*, trans. Kathrin Simon (London: Collins, 1964), 58.

These aesthetic models were linked to different political agendas in Mexican and Latin American artistic production in the twentieth century. In 1920s Mexico, the Ateneo promoted humanistic values of culture and education, rejuvenating the Renaissance ideal of a socially instructive mode of art. This vision was realised by the muralists and other state-sponsored artists linked to the so-called ‘renacimiento mexicano’, who recuperated Renaissance artistic principles to project a redemptive aesthetic vision of the revolution and a new code of civil conduct. As Zamora and Kaup note, towards the middle of the century Latin American intellectuals reappropriated the baroque forms that had been imported to Latin America during the Conquest, employing them as an anticolonial tool for disrupting hegemonic power structures.⁶⁴ Cuban writers such as Alejo Carpentier and Severo Sarduy creatively repurposed the seventeenth century Baroque as a revolutionary aesthetic form ‘que metaforiza al orden discutido, al dios juzgado, a la ley transgredida’.⁶⁵ In Mexico, a crisis of revolutionary values during the 1950s and 1960s provided the backdrop for mobilisations of the baroque in the works of artists reassessing established models of national identity, from Paz and Fuentes to the visual artists of the *Ruptura* generation.

Rivera and Rulfo, as I will argue, use Renaissance and baroque aesthetic models to political effect. In what follows I analyse both artists’ portrayals of the peasant mass as a political entity. In this reading, I look for the conditions that transform the campesino collective from a meek and orderly congregation to an amorphous, animalised collective. Situating *El reparto* within the ambit of contemporary Christianised rhetoric of land reform, I examine how Rivera draws from Giotto’s approach to group portraiture to promote the

⁶⁴ Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup, “Categories and Concepts”, in *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest*, eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 1-14.

⁶⁵ Severo Sarduy, *Barroco* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1974), 184.

notion of *bonum commune* and to portray the campesinado as the meek beneficiaries of state intervention. Turning to the progressively strained political climate that reached a violent turning point in the 1960s, I consider how the state-campesino relationship is alternatively visualised in Rulfo's monologue for *La fórmula*, which evolves from an unanswered prayer for assistance to a profane litany and prophecy of apocalyptic unrest. Drawing from Gilles Deleuze's interpretation of the baroque process of 'becoming' as a means of imagining alternative resistant modes of subjectivity, I explore how Rulfo's poetic imagery and the audio-visual elements of the film offer an aesthetic and political alternative to the model of crowd representation presented in Rivera's mural by imagining the campesinado as a centreless and non-hierarchical animal collective.

Rivera's *El reparto de tierras*: The Campesinado and the Corporate Body Politic

Speaking in 1923, Vasconcelos affirmed that 'el verdadero artista debe trabajar para el arte y para la religión, y la religión moderna, el moderno fetiche, es el Estado socialista, organizado para el bien común'.⁶⁶ Conceiving their works as universally legible 'Biblias pintadas', the muralists turned to Renaissance form and figuration during the early years of the movement to construct a sacralised revolutionary art founded on this collectivist ethos.⁶⁷ As a student in Italy, Rivera analysed the visual languages of Michelangelo, Gozzoli and Uccello, but was most admiring of Giotto, whom he revered as Christianity's greatest propagandist.⁶⁸ Giotto's profound influence on Rivera's pictorial language, already seen in his Christ-like depiction of the rural teacher in the first section of this chapter, reveals itself again in his approach to group

⁶⁶ José Vasconcelos, "José Vasconcelos por Ortega", *El Universal Ilustrado*, November 23, 1923, 35.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Alma M Reed, *Orozco* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 179.

⁶⁸ Diego Rivera "El espíritu revolucionario en el arte moderno", in *Textos de arte*, 171.

portraiture in *El reparto de tierras* at Chapingo. Taking inspiration from Giotto's Christian themes in the Arena Chapel fresco cycle (1305), the mural upholds a corporatist ideal of a docile and deferential campesinado by subordinating individual peasant bodies to the collective order of the composition and envisioning land distribution as an act of divine intervention on the part of the state.

Rivera's fresco programme at Chapingo provides the clearest example of his revolutionary repurposing of religious spaces and visual forms. Alongside the decorative scheme of the renovated chapel, which transformed it into a 'Sistine Chapel of the new age', the four open-air scenes in the adjacent administrative building adhere to the simplicity and serenity of early Renaissance composition.⁶⁹ While the twin frescoes *El buen gobierno* and *El mal gobierno* (1924), situated on the east and west walls, take direct inspiration from Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government* (1338), Giotto's influence is more subtly revealed in *El reparto*. Located on the north wall of the upper floor, the mural depicts a crowd of male peasants assembled around the central figure of the state agronomist as he presides over the act of land distribution (fig.4.17). For this particular mural, Rivera diverged from his strategy of plastic integration and followed the conventions of early-Renaissance fresco by setting the scene within a rigid rectangular frame. As I will go on to demonstrate, by adopting the strategies employed by Giotto to subordinate and restrain certain figures within his group scenes, Rivera imposes the restrictive and static order of the mural's overall composition onto the peasant mass contained within it.

Dressed in pristine white with their eyes fixed attentively on the *ingeniero*, the overlapping forms of the peasants recall the angelic congregations portrayed in Giotto's *Last*

⁶⁹ Louis Gillet, "L'art dans l'Amérique latine", in *Histoire de l'art*, ed. André Michel (Paris: Colin, 1929), 1093.

Judgment in the Arena Chapel (1304-1305) (fig. 4.18) and Fra Angelico's *Christ Glorified in the Court of Heaven* (1430) (fig.4.19), where the central figure of Christ is framed by a multitude of neatly arranged angels whose gazes and tilting bodies gravitate toward him. The ideological implications of this visual grammar of the crowd are significant. In his recent analysis of dominant iconographies of the crowd in Western art, Jeffrey Schnapp identifies the 'geometrically arrayed choirs that surround the Redeemer in vast tableaux of total order' in Giotto, Fra Angelico and Perugino as examples of what he terms an 'emblematic' mode of crowd representation. Historically used to depict disciplined followers paying reverence to the divine, the emblematic mass represents an 'orderly model of the formation of the body politic' in which 'individuals lose their contours in order to regain them within the confines of a single corporate body'.⁷⁰ Art historian Richard Offner underlines this particular emphasis on corporate unity in Giotto's approach to group portraiture:

The composition being conceived as a system of interdependent elements, each figure is accommodated to the whole by being contoured and modelled large in order not to draw too much attention to itself by individualisation or description of its physical character. To the same end its needs must be immobilised. The composition thus subjugates the individual form to a corporate order and equilibrium.⁷¹

Offner's emphasis on the 'corporate order' of human forms in Giotto's work supports Reiss's contention that the pictorial language of the Arena Chapel cycle is fundamentally informed by Aquinas's concept of the 'common good' as the basis of societal justice.⁷² For Reiss,

⁷⁰ Jeffrey T. Schnapp, "Mob Porn", in *Crowds*, eds. Jeffrey T. Schnapp and Matthew Tiewis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 5.

⁷¹ Richard Offner, "Giotto, Non-Giotto", in *Giotto: The Arena Chapel Frescoes*, ed. James H. Stubblebine (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 139.

⁷² Jonathan B. Reiss, "Justice and The Common Good in Giotto's Arena Chapel Frescoes", in *The Arena Chapel and the Genius of Giotto: Padua*, ed. Andrew Ladis (London: Garland, 1998), 237.

Giotto's murals pictorially endorse Aquinas's notion of 'civic Christianity', which stipulates that the welfare of the individual should not take precedence over that of the broader society.⁷³

This subordination of individual bodies to the collective order is used to strikingly similar effect in *El reparto*, where Rivera's emblematic composition of the crowd visually upholds corporatist principles of political organisation. Here the subjugation of individual interests to the common good is reflected in the collective configuration of the peasants whose neatly overlapping figures, uniformed attire and generic or even partially erased facial features enable them to merge into a single mass. The sense of serenity emanating from this orderly arrangement of bodies is complemented by a limited palette of celestial golds and rich blue tones borrowed from Giotto's serene biblical scenes and the harmonious interrelation of human and natural elements within the mural. Reflecting the artist's belief that agrarian reform would promote 'la armonía de los hombres con la tierra y de los hombres entre sí', a correlation is established between the undulating forms of the peasant mass and the rolling hills on the horizon.⁷⁴

Rivera's pictorial articulation of *bonum commune* was consistent with contemporary agrarista rhetoric which conflated the collectivist spirit of land reform with the Christian principles of selflessness and fraternal harmony. To the right of the composition, Marte R. Gómez holds forth a blueprint for the 'Primer Pueblo Cooperativo de la República Mexicana', an agricultural cooperative that was intended to function as a model for the communities of Chapingo. A plaque located on the site aligns its communal ethos with foundational Christian values: 'No tenemos templos, nuestra oración es el trabajo. Nuestra fe, el bienestar colectivo.'

⁷³ Reiss, "Justice and The Common Good", 329.

⁷⁴ This motto is emblazoned on one of the smaller agrarian-themed panels in the Patio del Trabajo of the SEP.

Nuestro dogma la cooperación'.⁷⁵ Reiterating Obregón's claim that the government's programme was 'esencialmente cristiano' in its 'espíritu de confraternidad y de equidad', Portes Gil claimed that the implementation of land reform in Tamaulipas had engendered a 'nueva humanidad' founded on 'la armonía fraternal' and 'el espíritu de cooperación'.⁷⁶ This moral congruency between Christian and agrarian values was also underlined by Lombardo Toledano in a pamphlet entitled "El reparto de tierras a los pobres no se opone a las enseñanzas de nuestro señor Jesucristo y de la santa madre Iglesia", published by the Grupo Solidario del Movimiento Obrero (GSMO) in 1923.⁷⁷ It featured a striking cover image by Rivera (fig. 4.20). Defending land distribution from clerical detractors who deemed it a violation of the natural right to property, Toledano presents Mexico's agrarian revolution as 'la continuación del establecimiento del orden nacido de la doctrina de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo, que nos enseña a gobernar la Tierra por el amor de los unos a los otros y no por el egoísmo'.⁷⁸

Land Distribution as an Act of Divine Justice

As its title suggests, Rivera's mural develops the thematic content of his cover illustration for Lombardo's pamphlet, most notably in its framing of land distribution as an act of divine justice. Rivera's illustration depicts a *sombrero*-clad peasant ploughing a field as he gazes up

⁷⁵ Emilio Zomzet, "Diego Rivera en el pueblo cooperativo en Chapingo", *Cultura urbana* no.18 (2007): 70. Silva Herzog writes that this utopian project was a 'fracaso completo por una sola causa: no hubo cooperatistas ni pudo haberlos porque las tierras circunvecinas son de mala calidad'. Jesús Silva Herzog, *Una vida en la vida de México: y, Mis últimas andanzas, 1947-1972* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1973), 81.

⁷⁶ Emilio Portes Gil, *Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana: un tratado de interpretación histórica* (Mexico City: Instituto Mexicano de Cultura, 1964), 330; Emilio Portes Gil, "Discurso pronunciado por el señor lic. Emilio Portes Gil, gobernador constitucional del estado", in *Segunda convención*, 81-82.

⁷⁷ The Grupo Solidario was founded by Lombardo in 1922 and included several prominent cultural figures including Rivera, Alfonso Caso, Julio Torri and Henríquez Ureña.

⁷⁸ Vicente Lombardo Toledano, "El reparto de tierras a los pobres no se opone a las enseñanzas de nuestro señor Jesucristo y de la santa madre iglesia", in *Obra histórico-cronológica* (Mexico City: Centro de Estudios Filosóficos, Políticos y Sociales Vicente Lombardo Toledano, 1994), 118.

to a suspended Christ-figure, whose arms are spread to display his radiant sacred heart. This miraculous image and the inclusion of an explanatory band of text in the lower section of the cover replicates the compositional scheme of the ex-voto, a form of popular votive offering used to express gratitude for the fulfilment of a prayer or miracle (fig. 4.21). As votive expression is inherently bound to a sense of human impotence and dependency on superior powers, Rivera's use of this popular iconographic form upholds the top-down logic of corporatist relations by indicating the peasantry's total reliance on state intervention for rural prosperity.

Rivera's depiction of the campesinado as the passive beneficiaries of an agrarian 'miracle' visually condenses the biblical metaphors at work in Lombardo's text. In the pamphlet, tracts of the 1917 Constitution are positioned alongside selective citations from Aquinas on the rightful claim to private property, Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), a text that drew heavily from Aquinas's organic-communal conception of state-societal relations, and a selectively abridged version of The Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:3–11).⁷⁹ As Butler highlights, Lombardo's agrarista reinterpretation of the Beatitudes conflates terrestrial and celestial rewards by substituting the city on the hill with the state-controlled ejido and by identifying the campesinado as the righteous yet submissive who will inherit the earth.⁸⁰ This equation of the peasantry with the biblical meek is of course highly significant in the context of post-revolutionary state-societal relations, as in the

⁷⁹ Vicente Lombardo Toledano, "El reparto de tierras", 118.

⁸⁰ Matthew Butler, "God's Campesinos? Mexico's Revolutionary Church in the Countryside", *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 28, no.2 (2009): 170.

Beatitudes meekness is conventionally used to refer to those who ‘must look to God for help and assistance’ and implies ‘submission to his will; flexibleness to his Word’.⁸¹

These pictorial and textual metaphors were in keeping with contemporary rhetoric and visual discourses of land reform during the 1920s, which presented the ejido as a ‘milagro’ that would socially and morally elevate the ‘moradores humildes de los pueblos’.⁸² Palacios and Gudiño argue that the official land petition forms submitted by rural communities reflect the internalisation of these ideas, revealing:

La representación que tienen de sí mismos (y que el discurso de los intelectuales se encarga de instituir), como los “pobres campesinos”, los “desheredados”, un grupo que debe “suplicar” para que les otorguen sus tierras.⁸³

The state’s fulfilment of these prayers is evidenced by official photographs depicting the federal agronomist standing alongside the local *campesinos beneficiados* (fig.4.22). As Ignacio Gutiérrez Ruvalcaba’s description makes clear, the distribution of bodies in these formulaic panoramic group portraits visually upholds the power relations described by Palacios and Gudiño:

El ingeniero [...] aparece en las fotografías como el eje de la estructura iconográfica. Los campesinos, por su parte, tienen un papel de subordinación ya que no son el centro del arreglo formal y siempre están en términos del funcionario agrario.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Blaine Charette, *The Theme of Recompense in Matthew's Gospel* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 86; Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes: An exposition of Matthew 5:1-12* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), 48.

⁸² Antonio Soto y Gama, “El milagro del ejido”, in *El pensamiento de Antonio Soto y Gama a través de 50 años de labor periodística 1899-1949*, ed. Ramón Iglesias González (Mexico City: UNAM, Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas, 1997).

⁸³ María Rosa Gudiño and Guillermo Palacios, “Peticiones de tierra y estrategias discursivas campesinas: procesos, contenidos y problemas metodológicos”, in *Estudios campesinos en el Archivo General Agrario*, ed. Antonio Escobar Ohmstede (Mexico City: Registro Agrario Nacional: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 1998), 108.

⁸⁴ Ignacio Gutiérrez Ruvalcaba, “Aproximación visual al mundo campesino”, in *La memoria agraria mexicana en imágenes: cuatro ensayos*, ed. Ignacio Gutiérrez Ruvalcaba (Mexico City: Registro Agrario Nacional, 2002), 33.

Ruvalcaba links the composition of these photographs to the language of prominent agraristas such as Julio Cuadros Caldas, author of *Catecismo agrario* (1923), who identified the agronomist as ‘simbólicamente el que tiene en sus manos la justicia’, while ‘el campesino solo es el demandante y el sujeto de justicia en el proceso’.⁸⁵

These power dynamics, and their biblical undertones, are vividly communicated in *El reparto*, where Rivera borrows from the gestural language of Giotto’s scenes to distinguish the agronomist as the supreme arbiter of rural justice from the ‘meek’ peasant onlookers. As both Wölfflin and Schnapp note, Renaissance group compositions conventionally pivot around a central, often sovereign, figure.⁸⁶ The mode is, of course, exemplified by Giotto’s *The Last Judgement* (1304-1305), where the central figure of Christ, flanked by two groups of angels, determines the fate of the blessed and the damned with two distinct gestures: his upward palm signals salvation for the blessed to his right-hand side, while his downward palm seals the eternal damnation of those to his left. Similarly, in *El reparto*, the inward tilting heads and gazes of the peasants are unanimously directed towards the agronomist who, like Giotto’s Christ, extends his upturned right palm to the congregation to signal their redemption. Rivera’s approach to the body language of the peasants is markedly different, drawing from the strategies used by Giotto to immobilise the ‘meek’ figures standing at the margins of his biblical scenes. Unlike the animated *ingeniero*, most of Rivera’s peasants stand with their hands lowered at their waist or at their side, suggesting a passive role within the visual narrative. Discussing Giotto’s visual rhetoric of gesture, Moshe Barasch identifies lowered or clasped hands as a demonstration of awe that is performed by characters of lower rank to

⁸⁵ Gutiérrez Ruvalcaba, “Aproximación visual al mundo campesino”, 24.

⁸⁶ Schnapp, “Mob Porn”, 5.

express ‘humility before a sacred, mysterious event’.⁸⁷ Analysing the meek, haloed onlookers in *Lamentation* (1306) (fig.4.23), Barasch echoes Offner’s earlier phrasing by describing the lowered and inactive hands of these figures as an expression of ‘symbolic self-immobilisation which makes one defenceless and thus at the mercy of higher powers’.⁸⁸ The similarly inactive postures of Rivera’s peasants in *El reparto*, marks a notable shift from his scenes of revolutionary agitation in the chapel frescoes. While scenes such as *El agitador* portray peasants as active agents of social change during the early armed phase of the conflict, his murals in the adjacent agricultural school offer an alternative vision of a docile and cooperative post-revolutionary campesinado.

Rivera’s image of a deferential and restrained peasant collective would gradually decay over the subsequent decades as the utopian aims of land reform failed to materialise. Discussing Lombardo’s 1923 pamphlet, José Abel Ogaz Pierce highlights how the text sounds a warning note by citing the lesson from Luke XXII that ‘los oprimidos recurren a la violencia ante la sordera de los opresores’.⁸⁹ Lombardo’s biblical prophecy reached a critical point in the 1960s, as the government’s neglect of the countryside in favour of industrialisation provoked rural disquiet. Alongside scholars like Jesús Silva Herzog and Moisés de la Peña, Mexican writers emerged as particularly harsh critics of the agrarian programme during this decade.⁹⁰ Following from his literary portrait of failed agrarian reform in *El luto humano* (1943), Revueltas’s major political essay “Ensayo sobre un proletariado sin cabeza” (1962)

⁸⁷ Moshe Barasch, *Giotto and the Language of Gesture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 42.

⁸⁸ Barasch, *Giotto and the Language of Gesture*, 46. Rivera also based the composition of *La liberación del peon* (1923) (fig.4.24) in the SEP on this piece.

⁸⁹ José Abel Ogaz Pierce, “El pensamiento agrario del joven Vicente Lombardo Toledano”, in *Personajes, cuestión agraria y Revolución Mexicana*, eds. Mónica Blanco and Esperanza Fujigaki (Mexico: INHERM, 2004), 329.

⁹⁰ Jesús Silva Herzog, “La propiedad de la tierra y el desarrollo histórico”, *Cuadernos Americanos*, no.1 (1959): 183-192; Moisés de la Peña, *El pueblo y su tierra: Mito y realidad de la reforma agraria en México* (Mexico City: Cuadernos Americanos, 1964).

criticised the state's corporatist subordination of peasant organisations and the failure of the Mexican left, particularly the PCM under Lombardo, to adequately serve the interests of the masses.⁹¹ During the mid 1960s, Elena Garro also published a series of articles on the disintegration of the agrarian project, while Fuentes decried how the state, 'en nuestro país, detrás de las fachadas retóricas, aún asesina a campesinos, los despoja de tierra y les niega el derecho a trabajar'.⁹²

Alternative Collectivities: The Baroque Pursuit of New Forms in *La fórmula*

This mounting unrest over the rural question provides the socio-historical backdrop to Rulfo's collaboration with Rubén Gámez on the black-and-white experimental *mediometraje La fórmula secreta* (1965). The opening shot of a patient receiving an intravenous transfusion of Coca-Cola makes clear the film's intentions to diagnose a crisis in the body politic in the age of globalisation. This formula triggers twelve hallucinatory episodes that converge to form a disjointed visual essay on contemporary capitalist expansion, cultural imperialism and rural decline. A voice-over of the poet Jaime Sabines reciting Rulfo's monologue appears in two key segments of the film that depict a group of campesinos standing in a lunar wasteland.⁹³ Although the film has been largely neglected by Rulfo scholars, it merits consideration due to its overtly political nature and the fact that it was the only cinematic project of which he acknowledged creative authorship.⁹⁴ Rulfo increasingly turned to cinema as an alternative creative outlet in the 1960s and his collaboration with Gámez was the most successful of these

⁹¹ José Revueltas, *Ensayo sobre un proletariado sin cabeza* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1980).

⁹² Elena Garro, "El problema agrario sigue en pie después de 50 años de revolución", *Siempre* no. 185 (1965): 2-12; Carlos Fuentes, "Carlos Fuentes", in *Los narradores ante el público*, ed. Rubén Marín (Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 1966), 153.

⁹³ Rulfo's text was published independently in the "La cultura en México" supplement of the magazine *Siempre* in 1976.

⁹⁴ Juan Rulfo, "Juan Rulfo examina su narrativa", 460.

projects, earning the film first prize at the *Primer Concurso de Cine Experimental* in Mexico City in 1965. Furthermore, unlike the generally unsuccessful cinematic adaptations of his works that had been produced up until this point, *La fórmula* arguably provides the closest cinematic approximation to Rulfo's aesthetic. This can be primarily attributed to Rulfo's own creative involvement in the project, but also the fact that Gámez admitted to drawing direct inspiration from the writer's imagery for his cinematography.

The director's self-proclaimed desire to produce 'un cine mexicano, el mexicano de Rulfo' reflects the creative exchanges that began to emerge between literature and cinema in the 1960s.⁹⁵ During the so-called 'Golden Age' of film production that lasted from the mid-1930s to the late 1950s, cinema replaced muralism as the state's principal tool of visual propaganda, with directors such as Emilio "El Indio" Fernández and the cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa transferring Rivera's monumental and folkloric graphic register to the screen. As the film industry entered a period of stagnation in the early 1960s, however, a group of writers, critics and cineastes including Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Monsiváis and Luis Buñuel coalesced around the journal *Nuevo Cine* with the aim of developing a more experimental and explicitly political cinematic style.⁹⁶ The movement, which provided something of a cinematic counterpart to the contemporary literary "Boom" in its ideological and aesthetic agenda, encouraged fluid interactions between both media. Fuentes and García Márquez both wrote screenplays, while Buñuel expressed an interest in adapting *PP* and

⁹⁵ Rubén Gámez, "Rubén Gámez: mi pretensión es crear un cine realmente mexicano", interview by Emilio García Riera, in *La fórmula secreta: Rubén Gámez*, ed. Damián Ortega (Mexico City: Alias, 2014), 182.

⁹⁶ Ernesto Acevedo-Muñoz, *Buñuel and Mexico: The Crisis of National Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 149.

Gámez set about creating ‘un cine significativo’ following the literary examples of Rulfo, Garro, Paz and Fuentes.⁹⁷

This direct link with contemporary literature in the case of Gámez’s filmmaking is useful for contextualising the baroque aspects of *La fórmula*. During the 1950s and 1960s, both Paz and Fuentes followed Sarduy and Carpentier in articulating political concerns through a neo-baroque aesthetic, adopting the tropes of the mirror and the labyrinth in their essayistic and literary explorations of national identity. For Ochoa, Fuentes’s interaction with neo-baroque style is most clearly revealed in *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* (1969), his literary manifesto for the Boom generation.⁹⁸ Aligning social and literary revolution, Fuentes’s extended essay advocates a break from realism and the embrace of a new narrative style defined by ambiguity and polysemy.⁹⁹ This baroque indeterminacy was also embraced by the visual artists of the counter-nationalist *Ruptura* and *Nueva Presencia* movements, such as Alberto Gironella and José Luis Cuevas, whose works of the late 1950s and 1960s replaced the heroic social realist language of the muralists with unstable, shadowy forms. Echoing Wölfflin’s identification of the baroque with ‘the restless, the becoming’, Fuentes highlighted the mobility of Cuevas’s ‘trans-figuras’ who lingered ‘entre el estar y el devenir’.¹⁰⁰ In literary and visual works such as these, the baroque emerges as a conceptual prism through which to articulate social and political unrest but also to formulate other possibilities for engaged art.

In what follows, I examine how Gámez and Rulfo similarly incorporate baroque elements for political purposes in *La fórmula*. While the film’s baroque sensibility is

⁹⁷ Rubén Gámez, “Conversaciones con Rubén Gámez”, interview by Alejandro Pelayo Rangel, in *La fórmula secreta*, 371.

⁹⁸ John A. Ochoa, *The Uses of Failure in Mexican Literature and Identity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 145.

⁹⁹ Fuentes, *La nueva novela hispanoamericana*, 32.

¹⁰⁰ Carlos Fuentes, “La violenta identidad de José Luis Cuevas”, in *Casa con dos puertas* (Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 1970), 240-241.

immediately signalled by the recurring interjections of Vivaldi's *Gloria* and the extended footage of the interior of the churrigueresque church of Santa María Tonantzintla in Puebla, I am more interested in how the poetic monologue and the audio-visual aspects of the second episode of the film harness the transformative capacity of the baroque to re-envisage the campesinado as a potentially subversive force. Drawing from Deleuze's interpretation of the baroque processes of folding and becoming as both aesthetic and ontological phenomena, I consider how *La fórmula* proposes an alternative to Rivera's Renaissance model of crowd representation and its underlying corporatist ideals by imagining the peasantry as a restlessly mutating organic and animal collective.

The first of the two episodes paired with Rulfo's monologue begins at approximately eight minutes into the film, when Gámez cuts to a man wearing a traditional *sarape* standing alone in a rural wasteland (fig.4.25). The camera slowly drifts across to the left, but the man unexpectedly repositions himself within the centre of the frame to interrogate the viewer. As Sabines begins reciting Rulfo's text, the camera slowly pans out to reveal several other men standing in the crevices of the landscape, establishing the voice-over as the poetic spokesperson for this forgotten rural community. The opening section of the monologue poetically distils the imagery of "Nos han dado la tierra" by describing a gradually eroding rural landscape and population. This earlier story about a dwindling group of peasants that trudge across a dusty plain to reach the parcel of land assigned to them through the repartition programme finds recurring echoes in the poetic and cinematic imagery of *La fórmula*. In a subtle play on the collectivist rhetoric of land reform, the poetic voice affirms that, although hunger has been 'repartida' amongst them, they do not possess enough land even to bury

themselves: ‘no tenemos ni siquiera/ donde caernos muertos’.¹⁰¹ The invocatory tone introduced by the refrain ‘alguien tiene que oírnos’ corresponds with Gámez’s alternating shots of the campesinos gazing upwards from the plain (fig.4.26) and the wide-eyed baroque angels peering down from the profusely ornamented church ceiling (fig.4.27). This interplay of gazes, indicating that the peasants are now collectively addressing these heavenly guardians, cinematically reproduces the tiered pictorial scheme of the ex-voto, which, as Charlot explained, portrays man as ‘a kind of deep-air animal crawling on rock bottom, his face lifted to a stratosphere where the holy beings dwell’.¹⁰² While this spatial aspect of the sequence reproduces the hierarchical power relations underpinning Rivera’s presentation of land reform as an act of divine justice, the impassive faces of the angels in *La fórmula* suggest that the prayers of these peasants will remain unanswered. The juxtaposition between the high-angle view of the campesinos and the upward tilting shots of the angels enforces a vertical tension between these celestial beings and the lowly peasants who are bound to the ‘tierra pasmada’ (1.3).

These spatial dynamics are maintained into the second section paired with Rulfo’s monologue, beginning at 24 minutes into the film, which opens with a shot of the men scrambling up in the hillside after nightfall. Like the peasants of “Nos han dado la tierra”, who undertake an arduous but fruitless journey to reach the land ‘allá arriba’ (44), the subsequent shots of their bodies strewn corpse-like on the plain suggest the futility of their efforts to reach

¹⁰¹ Juan Rulfo, “La formula secreta”, in Juan Rulfo, *El gallo de oro; La fórmula secreta*, eds. José Carlos González Boixo and Douglas Weatherford (Mexico City: Ediciones RM, 2010), 151-155, 1.13-14 (subsequent line numbers in brackets refer to the same published version). This is a reworking of a line from the story “El Llano en llamas”: ‘De este modo se nos fue acabando la tierra. No nos quedaba ni el pedazo que pudiéramos necesitar para que nos enterraran’ (110).

¹⁰² Jean Charlot, “Mexican Ex-Votos”, *Magazine of Art* 42, no.4 (April 1949): 141. Rulfo’s configuration of the monologue as a cry for divine assistance was likely influenced by Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Duino Elegies*, which he translated into Spanish between 1945 and 1953. Throughout the *Elegies*, the poet is mesmerised by a chorus of terrifying baroque angels, whose heavenly sphere is counterposed with the failed world of man.

higher ground. However, while these images appear to indicate the peasants' demise, such an interpretation is complicated by Gámez's baroque manipulation of shadow to render human forms open and mutable. As Wölfflin explains in his chapter "Clearness and Unclearness", the interplay of light and shadow or *chiaroscuro* in Baroque composition, results in a blurring of limits and the dissolution of stable Renaissance forms.¹⁰³ In Gámez's scene, the figures oscillate between form and formlessness in the darkness as they merge with the landscape, animating it with their movements (fig.4.28). This visual allusion to the peasants' transformative capacity is confirmed by the voice-over monologue and the film's other sound elements. The harmonious interrelation between the peasant collective and the land presented in Rivera's mural evolves into a more violent alliance in Rulfo's text, as Sabines insists that their voices, droning like a swarm of wasps, will be heeded, and speculates whether their transformation into a destructive natural force might liberate them from their present circumstances:

Alguien tendrá que oírnos.
Cuando dejemos de gruñir como avispas en enjambre,
o nos volvamos cola de remolino
[...]
tal vez
nos llegue a todos
el remedio (1.46-55)

This prophecy is played out through the audio elements of the second episode, which evokes the transformation of the campesinado into a series of threatening natural and animal entities. Over the sound of rolling thunder and howling winds, Sabines's reverberating voice

¹⁰³ Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History*, 274-304.

prophesies their dissolution into foam, ash and rubble and simultaneous transformation into a ‘remolino de muertos’ and a ‘cola de relámpago’ (2.56-57).

These volatile mutations of the peasantry suggest links with Deleuze’s discussion of seventeenth-century Baroque thought and aesthetics in *The Fold*, where he identifies its endless production of forms or ‘folds’ as a means of conceptualising alternative and particularly non-human modes of subjectivity.¹⁰⁴ Building on Wölfflin’s interpretation of the Baroque as an ‘uninterrupted flow of becoming’, Deleuze uses the mobile fold as a tool for analysing contemporary aesthetics and as the conceptual basis for a migratory or ‘nomadic’ mode of existence that resides in a liminal, in-between space known as the *intermezzo*.¹⁰⁵ Deleuze’s ‘nomadology’ provides a useful bridging concept for understanding Rulfo’s representation of the body across his literary, photographic and cinematic corpora. Like Comala’s ghosts, described as a ‘puro vagabundear de gente’ (241) and the indistinct migratory subjects of his urban photographs, the wandering campesinos of Rulfo’s monologue display a striking mobility in both their navigation of physical space and their bodily composition. Like the images of corporeal fragmentation and overflow discussed in Chapters Two and Three, Rulfo’s monologue presents a vision of the human body *in extremis* that suggests new creative possibilities. Although for Deleuze, and his long-time collaborator Félix Guattari, ‘becoming’ involves a process through which ‘all forms are undone’, they underline its regenerative capacity by aligning it with the botanical metaphor of the rhizome as a decentralised mode of thought and political practice. In contrast to vertical arborescent or tree-like structures, which stand for stratified authoritarian totalities, the rhizome endlessly

¹⁰⁴ Simon O’Sullivan, “Fold”, in *Deleuze Dictionary Revised Edition*, ed. Adrian Parr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 107.

¹⁰⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004), 380.

proliferates outwards in nomadic ‘lines of flight’ from established identities and systems of relations.¹⁰⁶ As the rhizome can be ‘broken, shattered at a given spot, but will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines’, it represents a creative intermediary state (‘between things, interbeing’) defined by flux, movement and change.¹⁰⁷ In Rulfo’s monologue, the image of the peasants’ bodies collectively spilling out across the plain like a ‘lightning bolt of corpses’, appears to enact Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of becoming as a ‘line of escape’ towards new zones of creation, while the intermingling elemental and organic images of their annihilation and recomposition strongly suggests a rhizomatic process of rupture and regeneration.

Upholding the consistent link in Rulfo’s literature between the image of the ‘enjambre’ and collective human sound, the swarm mentioned in the first section of the monologue is aurally evoked as Sabine’s invocations to ‘Santo Dios’ and ‘Santo Inmortal’ are interspersed with a chorus of voices monotonously repeating the refrain ‘ruega por nosotros’. As the droning chant grows more insistent, the poetic voice appeals to St Anthony, protector of animals, before launching into a profane litany:

Atajo de malvados, punta de holgazanes.

Ruega por nosotros.

Sarta de bribones, retahíla de vagos.

Ruega por nosotros.

Cáfila de bandidos.

Ruega por nosotros (2.87-91)

On the annual feast day of St Anthony animals are traditionally adorned with flowers and ribbons and brought into church spaces to be blessed. Rulfo’s allusion to the saint and his description of the peasants as an ‘atajo’, directly recalling his description of the peasants of

¹⁰⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 36.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 23, 10.

“Nos han dado” as an ‘atajo de mulas’, seems to grotesquely parody the agrarista notion of the campesinado as the ‘blessed meek’ by imagining the peasant collective as an animalised religious procession.

In view of the film’s explicitly political agenda, Rulfo’s reimagining of the peasant collective as a swarm or herd can be illuminated by Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of becoming-animal, a manifestation of ‘becoming’ that sees humans leave the realm of stable forms and enter a ‘zone of indiscernibility’ with the animal. Although Deleuze and Guattari draw their key examples of this process of nomadic deterritorialisation from literature and cinema, they underline its social significance by defining it as a collective impulse (‘it always involves a pack, a band, a population, a peopling’) that affects ‘minoritarian’ social groups located on ‘the fringe of recognised institutions’.¹⁰⁸ For both thinkers, the subversive potential of ‘demonic’ animal collectives such as swarms, herds and packs is revealed through their rhizomatic composition.¹⁰⁹ As these assemblages lack a clear centre and operate along fluid horizontal connections, the collective becoming-animal of the peasantry suggests the possibility of their breaking away from the vertical power relations established with the angels in the first episode. This movement is reflected in the graphic composition of the monologue. While the first section of the text adheres to a narrow vertical structure, it becomes unfixed in the second part where the lines begin to lurch erratically across the page. Working against the strategies of collective subordination and immobilisation operating in Rivera’s classically inspired fresco, this baroque collapsing of the campesinado collective into a mobile, centreless mass gestures towards the possibility of an anarchic and pluralist mode of political organisation.

¹⁰⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 239, 272.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

The decay of the muralist's orderly angelic congregation into the unstable animalised multitude of *La fórmula* recalls the transition described by Wölfflin from the 'heavenly calm and content' of Renaissance composition to the Baroque 'feeling of anticipation, of something yet to come, of dissatisfaction and restlessness'.¹¹⁰ This sense of anticipation and agitation, this 'yet to be' of the baroque, acquires a more urgent and ominous dimension through *La fórmula*'s apocalyptic allusions. As biblical destruction preludes the creation of a more just world, the film's apocalyptic imagery and soundscape underscore the political significance of the baroque pursuit of new forms. The threatening image of the 'enjambre' recalls numerous biblical descriptions of swarms of insects as expressions of divine retribution (Revelation 9:10, Exodus 23:28, Exodus 18:24), while their anticipated transformation into a 'relámpago de muertos' and a 'remolino de muertos', brings to mind images of apocalyptic elemental destruction from the Books of Jeremiah (23:19, NIV), Isaiah (29:6, NIV) and Revelation (4:5, NIV). These descriptions of natural unrest, and particularly the recurring image of the 'remolino', capture the baroque's sublime intent to plunge the viewer into an 'abyss of infinity'.¹¹¹ The baroque motif of the whirl, described by Deleuze as 'a vortical form always put in motion by a renewed turbulence', is further evoked by the sound of howling winds and Sabines's booming voice which contribute to the film's attempt to create the impression of falling through a vortex: 'Surgen sueños incoherentes algunas veces a un ritmo violento, como si hubiera caído en la sonda de un remolino'.¹¹² These disorienting sound effects and the camera's constant perspectival shifts between the church interior and the exposed plain exploit cinema's particular capacity to generate what Deleuze describes as the baroque's unique

¹¹⁰ Wölfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque*, 38.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹¹² Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold*, trans. Tom Conley (London: Continuum: 2006), 4; Juan Rulfo, "Sinopsis", in *Toda la obra*, 364.

‘architecture of vision’.¹¹³ In baroque composition, Deleuze claims, the outward proliferation of sensuous folds destabilises the static and centralised order of classical systems by disintegrating the perceptual limits of the frame.¹¹⁴ The unstable cinematic space of *La fórmula* and the nomadic mutating peasants inhabiting it, provides a counterpoint to the correlation between aesthetic and bodily composition established in *El reparto*. While Rivera’s ‘immobilised’ peasantry are contained within the rectangular border that rigidly encloses the composition, *La fórmula* articulates an emancipation of both aesthetic and collective bodily forms by sensorially evoking the eruption of the peasant mass from the confines of the screen.

As I noted in the introduction to this chapter, the Baroque emerged in seventeenth century Europe as a response to the collapse of the utopian project of the Renaissance. The turn towards baroque aesthetics in Gámez’s film and more broadly in mid-century visual and literary expression in Mexico can also be viewed, in part, as a reaction to the crisis of the institutionalised revolution and its established aesthetic models. As Paz later commented, muralism produced a sacralised iconography that granted divine authority to the state’s interpretation of national reality: ‘La gente mira sus pinturas como los devotos las imágenes sagradas [...] El Gobierno mexicano ha hecho del muralismo un culto nacional y, claro, en todos los cultos se proscriben la crítica’.¹¹⁵ By appropriating religious forms and symbols in his early state-commissioned work, Rivera articulated a vision of collective post-revolutionary salvation based on collaboration between the state and a cooperative peasant population. With the onset of post-revolutionary disenchantment during the latter part of the twentieth century,

¹¹³ Deleuze, *The Fold*, 23.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹⁵ Octavio Paz, “Visión e ideología sobre el muralismo mexicano”, *Vuelta* no. 121 (1986): 14.

however, muralism became the focus of revisionist assessment amongst writers and intellectuals. In a 1967 essay comparing the artistic traditions of muralism and the revolutionary novel, Revueltas challenged the leftist credentials of the movement, exposing its fundamental ideological contradictions. ‘En la pintura mexicana revolucionaria’, he writes, ‘el Estado, que representa a la burguesía, aparece flotando por encima de las contradicciones históricas y sociales, como la Divina Providencia flotaba encima de las aguas’.¹¹⁶ Revueltas claimed that through this collusion with the state, the movement had produced an ‘espejo deformante’ of Mexican reality.¹¹⁷ Alongside Paz’s account of the movement, Revueltas’s bitter critique reveals the extent to which the iconography of the muralists weighed on a subsequent generation of artists reflecting on the revolution’s legacy into the 1960s. Considered in light of these comments, the abundance of inverted biblical images presented in Revueltas’s own literature can perhaps be seen as an intentional strategy to produce a distorted vision of the already deformed images of the muralists.

Situating Rulfo’s works within the same revisionist moment of Revueltas and Paz, the grim biblical parable of “Luvina” and the profane litany of *La fórmula* can also be understood as an attempt to actively disfigure the visual narratives of revolutionary redemption produced by Rivera and other nation-builders in the optimistic years that immediately followed the armed revolution. A comparative analysis of these representations in the context of the post-revolutionary state’s educational and agrarian reform programmes has revealed how both artists drew from strikingly similar iconographic vocabularies to illustrate the peasantry’s response to state intervention in the countryside. By analysing a broad range of media

¹¹⁶ José Revueltas, “Escuela Mexicana de Pintura y novela de la Revolución”, in *Cuestionamientos e intenciones* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1981), 261.

¹¹⁷ Revueltas, “Escuela Mexicana de Pintura y novela de la Revolución”, 261.

including literature, muralism, illustration and cinema in relation to changing political discourses of agrarian reform, I have used their works to trace an evolution in aesthetic interpretations of the campesino mass from a receptive, malleable and docile collective to a resistant and potentially subversive entity.

Despite the clear political undercurrents to his representations of the peasantry, Rulfo denied the existence of any critical content in his work, asserting that ‘una crítica se hace cuando uno se [sic] tiene una solución’.¹¹⁸ As an artist who came of age in a cultural sphere dominated by the muralists, Rulfo’s resolute anti-didacticism suggests a conscious desire to move away from the sweeping political statements and visual rhetoric of the previous decades. His later turn to baroque aesthetics is indicative of such a shift. As Umberto Eco notes, the openness of the baroque can be perceived on both formal and interpretative levels, as it replaces the ‘unquestionable definitiveness’ of closed classical Renaissance form with a poetics of multiplicity and indeterminacy that invites multiple interpretations.¹¹⁹ This move from Renaissance to baroque figuration in Rivera’s and Rulfo’s works again underlines a shift from a fundamentally didactic to interrogative body aesthetic, or to recall Fuentes’s description of the *nueva novela*, a transition ‘de la seguridad de las respuestas a la impugnación de las preguntas’.¹²⁰ While, as Rulfo insists, his work offers no concrete solutions or strategies of resistance for the real counterparts of his disenfranchised campesinos, his images of corporeal instability and indeterminacy invite questions about the possibility of configuring alternative futures.

¹¹⁸ Juan Rulfo, “He dejado de publicar, pero nunca dejaré de escribir: Juan Rulfo”, interview by Dimas Lidio Pitty, *El Gallo Ilustrado*, July 5, 1970, 419.

¹¹⁹ Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (London: Hutchinson, 1981), 52.

¹²⁰ Fuentes, *La nueva novela*, 13.

Conclusion

How do the restless bodies searching for renewal in *La fórmula secreta* move forward in history? Rulfo's prophetic images of collective disquiet and destruction poetically foreshadowed the greatest manifestation of popular unrest in Mexico since the revolution. Although an urban and middle-class phenomenon, the eruption of the student movement in 1968, just three years after the film's release, represented the culmination of a groundswell of discontent within both the rural and working class groups. Mobilising the slogans and symbols of the Mexican revolution, the students sought to repossess the revolutionary discourse of a PRI government that after four decades of electoral hegemony had evolved into a distinctly authoritarian neo-Porfirian regime. On October 2nd, ten days before the Summer Olympics were to open in the capital, the military opened fire on several thousand students congregating at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in the Tlatelolco district of Mexico City, killing a still undefined number. Although the violent silencing of the protesters prevented the movement from achieving the radical democratic change it demanded, the massacre produced a crisis of legitimacy for the PRI that gradually eroded its authority, giving way to limited political pluralism in the subsequent decades.¹

Elena Poniatowska noted the parallels between the student uprising and the events that unfolded between 1910 and 1917, but underlined a fundamental difference: 'La movilización en la calle no era de campesinos ni obreros. Se trataba de una marcha de leídos y escritos que se rebelaban'.² Just as visual art had been instrumental to its consolidation, literature was bound up in the attempted dismantling of the institutionalised

¹ Dolores Trevizo, *Rural Protest and the Making of Democracy in Mexico, 1968-2000* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 189 -190.

² Elena Poniatowska, "El movimiento estudiantil de 1968", in *Fuerte es el silencio* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1980), 35.

revolution. Rulfo pledged his support for the students along with several other writers including Monsiváis, Vicente Leñero and Revueltas, who is commonly considered a key intellectual architect of the movement. Lines of Paz's poetry were emblazoned on banners during marches and subsequently read by imprisoned protesters.³ Alongside other poetic and prose works by Paz, Luis González de Alba and María Luisa Mendoza, Poniatowska's *La noche de Tlatelolco* (1971), a text combining testimonial fragments and graphic images of the protesters' mutilated bodies, played a critical role in challenging state-authorised accounts of the event in its aftermath.

The subtle interplay between textual and bodily fragmentation established in Poniatowska's work also emerges in Paz's poem "Totalidad y fragmento" (1970), where the poet engages in a broader meditation on how artists respond to moments of national trauma. Dedicated to the *Ruptura* artist José Luis Cuevas, the poem concludes with the line: 'José Luis dibuja nuestra herida'.⁴ Throughout this piece, artistic expression is conceived as an act of violence inflicted on the blank page by instruments of visual and literary production:

contra la hoja
desgarra acribilla pincha sollama atiza
acuchilla apuñala traspasa abrasa calcina
pluma lápiz pincel

The resulting 'herida' is figured as a 'pueblo de líneas', which in turn is linked to the lines etched by the artist and those lining the poet's notebook. The acts of writing and sketching produce a wound that is 'nuestra' -- a mark on both the surface of the page and the collective body of the nation. This collapsing of poetic and pictorial forms is registered in the text's striking visual form: multiple fragmented lines combine to form both the

³ Claire Brewster, "Mexico 1968: A Crisis of National Identity", in *Memories of 1968: International Perspectives*, eds. Ingo Cornils and Sarah Waters (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 156-157.

⁴ Octavio Paz, "Totalidad y fragmento", in *Obras completas de Octavio Paz*, vol.12 (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994) 48-49.

aesthetic whole of the poem and the imagined 'pueblo'. Through these interlinked elements, the body, the artwork and the nation converge to form a single entity whose meaning is inscribed by the visual artist and the writer.

Post-Revolutionary Body Politics has explored how post-revolutionary artists and thinkers used the body to narrate the Mexican nation during moments of societal transition and crisis, from the hopeful days that followed the end of the Revolution to the disillusionment of the 1960s. By examining the bodily aesthetics of Diego Rivera and Juan Rulfo side by side, and against the shifting landscapes of twentieth-century intellectual and political history, I have traced an arc in aesthetic and intellectual interpretations of the revolution and its outcomes, from reconstruction to revisionism. This historically contextualised comparative analysis has shed light for the first time on both the function of the body as a locus for the articulation of aspirations and anxieties regarding the revolutionary project in Rivera's and Rulfo's works, and its broader centrality, in both metaphorical and material terms, to post-revolutionary political, intellectual and artistic conceptions of national identity.

The interplay between visual and literary forms in Paz's poem also highlights the intimate interactions between these media in post-revolutionary artistic production. Despite Lois Parkinson Zamora's call in 1999 for scholars of Latin American literature to do away with 'the unnecessary disciplinary divisions that currently characterise the academic study of the arts', few have embraced the challenge.⁵ Recent works and edited collections in the field of Latin American cultural studies on topics ranging from gender (Tania Gómez, Patricia Bolaños-Fabres and Christina Mougoyanni Hennessy, 2015) to the Gothic (Sandra Casanova-Vizcaíno and Inés Ordiz, 2017) and human rights (Fernando J.

⁵ Lois Parkinson Zamora, "Interartistic Approaches to Contemporary Latin American Literature", *MLN* 114, no. 2 (1999): 389.

Rosenberg, 2017) demonstrate how studies that adopt an ostensibly interdisciplinary scope continue to respect the disciplinary divisions described by Zamora by categorising literary and visual media under separate headings. This study has broken new ground by offering the first examination of cultural production in post-revolutionary Mexico that establishes a sustained dialogue between visual and verbal forms of representation. By applying an interartistic methodology encompassing muralism, painting, illustration, literature, photography and cinema, the thesis has proposed a new multi-dimensional way of visualising post-revolutionary cultural production and Rivera and Rulfo as individual artists. As I argued in the introduction, the use of a varied multimedia corpus is demanded by the specific historical context of this period, which saw fluid interactions between visual media and literature in the spheres of both artistic production and criticism. In my analyses of the treatment of common themes across literary and visual texts, I have demonstrated how artistic practitioners operating in a range of media contributed to the same ongoing debate on national identity during these decades and how their works were influenced by or responded to concepts and images circulating within this shared artistic sphere. In highlighting these connections, this interdisciplinary comparative framework has also produced a richer and more complete portrait of Rivera and Rulfo as individual artists. Our understanding of Rulfo's aesthetic vision, in both its thematic and formal dimensions, can be greatly enriched by first examining Rivera's. Similarly, re-reading Rivera through a Rulfian lens enables us to modify our conceptualisation of his works and to fully appreciate the weight of his legacy on a subsequent generation of artists. My readings of these two artists have also thrown into relief the formal qualities of their works, demonstrating how they and other practitioners used the expressive capacities of their respective media to communicate political concerns.

By situating Rivera and Rulfo within the wider constellation of thinkers and artists who shaped the national imaginary during these decades, my discussion has also brought to the fore the profound but previously unexplored links between intellectual and artistic activity during these decades. Rather than study their corpora in a vacuum, I have explored their works in the context of contemporary developments in the fields of philosophy, historiography, anthropology and architecture, shedding light on the conditions that harvested their aesthetic visions and drawing out previously unexamined patterns in how artists and thinkers interpreted the concepts of nation and revolution during pivotal historical periods in the twentieth century.

The thesis has already indicated several avenues for further interdisciplinary inquiry. By incorporating previously unstudied archival material, my final chapter drew attention to the use of religious motifs and iconography in pro-government visual propaganda during the era of socialist education. This intersection between revolutionary politics and religious symbolism within the domains of visual and literary culture demands further scholarly attention, particularly in the context of the religiously motivated Cristero War (1926-1929). My readings of Rulfo's photographs revealed the political dimensions of these works, highlighting formal, rather than purely thematic, parallels between his textual and visual works. This still largely overlooked aspect of Rulfo's corpus, along with his screenplays and writings on architecture, remain an untapped resource that can provide greater insight into his aesthetic and political concerns. Although only briefly addressed in this project, further research into Rivera's work as both an architect and theorist of building design would also provide a new angle from which to assess this canonical artist and the creative exchanges between muralism and architecture during this period.

Throughout *Post-Revolutionary Body Politics*, I have argued that Rivera's and Rulfo's corporeal imaginaries embody two distinct visions of revolutionary nationhood in

the twentieth century, of its utopian possibilities and devastating realities, that nevertheless converse with each other. These visions continue to inhabit the present. Although somewhat eclipsed today by his wife Frida Kahlo, Rivera's murals remain integral to the official image of Mexico that is promoted both internationally and domestically. During his presidency, Enrique Peña Nieto routinely welcomed political leaders at the Palacio Nacional by offering an explanatory tour of Rivera's *Epopéya del pueblo mexicano*. In June 2018, Peña Nieto announced the opening of a new history museum in the palace that would inspire national pride in Mexicans and function as 'un valioso instrumento para la difusión de la historia y de los valores cívicos entre los mexicanos'.⁶ In his inaugural speech, Finance Secretary José Antonio González Anaya positioned the museum within a tradition of public cultural dissemination in Mexico initiated by Vasconcelos and Rivera's fresco programme at the SEP.⁷

While Rivera's visual narratives remain closely intertwined with official discourses of national identity, Rulfo's literature still speaks to an alternative Mexico. Tributes and commemorative events marking the centenary of the writer's birth in 2017 confirmed his status as a monumental figure in the field of Mexican letters and prompted reflection on the resonance of his bleakest narratives in a contemporary Mexico dominated by arbitrary violence and state brutality. According to the essayist and writer Jorge Volpi, the reverberations of Rulfo's novel reveal the lack of any significant change in the political landscape since its original publication: '(Rulfo) nos habla tanto de su tiempo como del

⁶ Enrique Peña Nieto, "Palabras del Presidente, licenciado Enrique Peña Nieto, durante la Inauguración del Museo Histórico del Palacio Nacional", www.gob.mx, 22 June 2018, <https://www.gob.mx/presidencia/prensa/palabras-del-presidente-de-los-estados-unidos-mexicanos-162554?idiom=es>.

⁷ José Antonio González Anaya and Cristina García Cepeda, "Diversas intervenciones durante la Inauguración del Museo Histórico del Palacio Nacional", www.gob.mx, 22 June 2018, <https://www.gob.mx/presidencia/prensa/diversas-162553?idiom=es>.

nuestro. Hoy, vivimos otro momento marcado por la ira y la rabia por los agravios de los años que corren justo entre la publicación de *Pedro Páramo* y nuestros días'.⁸

Yet how can these seemingly irreconcilable images co-exist within the cultural imagination? The potent afterlives of these two artistic corpora suggest, to recall Alan Knight, that the revolution remains 'many revolutions'.⁹ Historians and non-specialists alike remain divided on whether the events that unfolded between 1910 and 1917 ultimately gave rise to a genuinely egalitarian democratic society or the consolidation of an authoritarian state that has still failed to address the problems of corruption, violence and social inequality. The political legacy of the revolution is of course most powerfully embodied by the PRI, a party that retained hegemonic rule from 1929 to 2000 and experienced a resurgence with the presidency of Peña Nieto from 2012 to 2018. The centenary of the promulgation of the Mexican Constitution in 2017 provided an opportunity to reassess the party's material achievements in upholding the revolution's supposed social ideals. Addressing the nation at the official commemorative ceremony to mark the 107th anniversary of the revolution in November 2017, Peña Nieto defended the government from criticism of its democratic failings by insisting that 'las instituciones son entidades vivas, inmersas en un proceso permanente de transformación y perfeccionamiento'.¹⁰ The analogy is significant, not only because it indicates that body metaphors are alive and well in contemporary Mexican politics, but because of the line of continuity it reveals with Porfirian organicist theories. Peña Nieto's description of state institutions as living entities engaged in an ongoing process of 'transformation and perfection' echoes the biological metaphors of societal evolution used by Justo Sierra to

⁸ Quoted in Javier Lafuente, "La mirada de Rulfo al México actual", *El País*, May 16, 2017. https://elpais.com/cultura/2017/05/16/actualidad/1494896049_638212.html.

⁹ Knight, "Interpreting the Mexican Revolution", 8.

¹⁰ Enrique Peña Nieto, "Proteger a las instituciones fortalece a México, vulnerarlas nos debilita a todos: Enrique Peña Nieto", www.gob.mx, 22 November 2017, <https://www.gob.mx/presidencia/prensa/proteger-a-las-instituciones-fortalece-a-mexico-vulnerarlas-nos-debilita-a-todos-enrique-pena-nieto>.

justify the authoritarianism of the Díaz regime. By conceptualising societal development in physiological terms, the *científicos* promoted a gradual and orderly process of change directed by a centralised state as opposed to sudden revolutionary transformation. In his 1878 essay “Positivismo político”, quoted in the introduction to this thesis, Sierra explains that ‘la sociedad, como todo organismo, está sujeta a las leyes necesarias de la evolución’ and argues that only through the gradual development of its constitutive parts will it achieve ‘el perfeccionamiento del organismo, lo que en las sociedades se llama progreso’.¹¹ The paradoxical correlation between these statements, uttered 140 years apart, reveals the importance of examining bodily metaphors to understand the contradictions and complexities of Mexico’s recent political history. While this project has focused exclusively on the corporeal images produced by Rivera and Rulfo in the period spanning from the 1920s to the 1960s, it has indicated the need for a historically expanded exploration of political bodies in Mexico and their parallel lives within the artistic and cultural spheres.

(Total word count-81,523)

¹¹ Sierra, “Positivismo político”, 238.

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